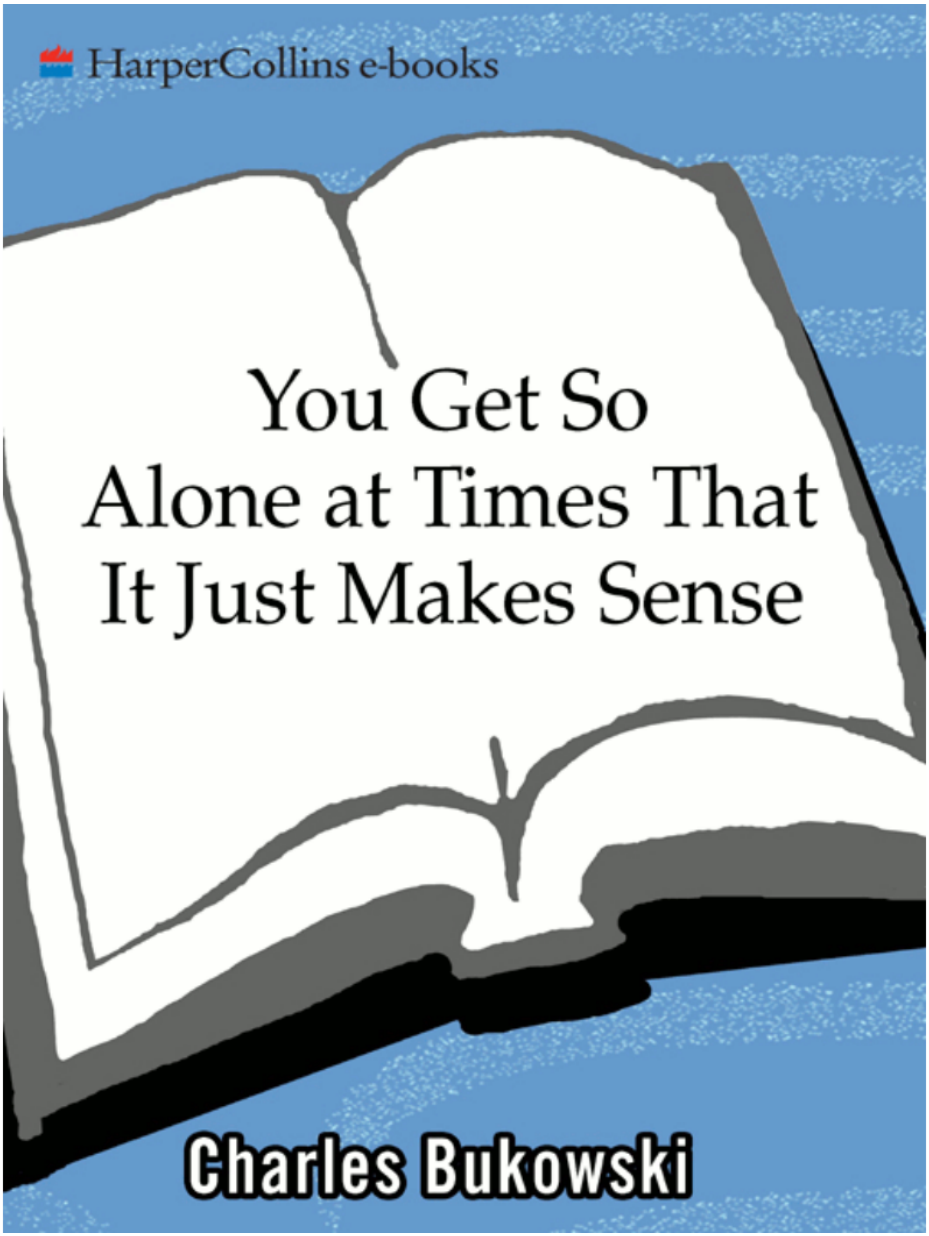
HarperCollins e-books
You Get So Alone at Times That It Just Makes Sense
Charles Bukowski

Charles Bukowski

You Get So Alone at Times That It Just Makes Sense

for Jeff Copland

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someday I'm going to write a primer for crippled saints but meanwhile

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1813-1883

listening to Wagner

as outside in the dark the wind blows a cold rain the

trees wave and shake lights go

off and on the walls creak and the cats run under the

bed…

Wagner battles the agonies, he's emotional but

solid, he's the supreme fighter, a giant in a world of

pygmies, he takes it straight on through, he breaks

barriers

an

astonishing FORCE of sound as

everything here shakes

shivers

bends

blasts

in fierce gamble

yes, Wagner and the storm intermix with the wine as

nights like this run up my wrists and up into my head and

back down into the

gut

some men never

die

and some men never

live

but we’re all alive

tonight.

red Mercedes

naturally, we are all caught in
downmoods, it's a matter of
chemical imbalance
and an existence
which, at times,
seems to forbid
any real chance at
happiness.

I was in a downmood
when this rich pig
along with his blank
inamorata
in this red Mercedes
cut
in front of me
at racetrack parking.

it clicked inside of me
in a flash:

I’m going to pull that fucker

out of his car and

kick his

ass!

I followed him

into Valet parking

parked behind him

and jumped from my

car

ran up to his

door

and yanked at

it.

it was

locked.

the

windows were

up.

I rapped on the window

on his

side:

“open up! I’m gonna
bust your
ass!”

he just sat there
looking straight
ahead.
his woman did
likewise.
they wouldn’t look
at me.

he was 30 years
younger
but I knew I could
take him
he was soft and
pampered.

I beat on the window
with my
fist:
“come on out, shithead,
or I’m going to start

breaking
glass!”

he gave a small nod
to his
woman.

I saw her reach
into the glove
compartment
open it
and slip him the
.32

I saw him hold it
down low
and snap off the
safety.

I walked off
toward the
clubhouse, it looked
like a damned good
card
that

day.

all I had to do

was

be there.

retired

pork chops, said my father, I love

pork chops!

and I watched him slide the grease

into his mouth.

pancakes, he said, pancakes with

syrup, butter and bacon!

I watched his lips heavy wetted with

all that.

coffee, he said, I like coffee so hot

it burns my throat!

sometimes it was too hot and he spit it

out across the table.

mashed potatoes and gravy, he said, I

love mashed potatoes and gravy!

he jowled that in, his cheeks puffed as

if he had the mumps.

chili and beans, he said, I love chili and

beans!

and he gulped it down and farted for hours

loudly, grinning after each fart.

strawberry shortcake, he said, with vanilla

ice cream, that's the way to end a meal!

he always talked about retirement, about

what he was going to do when he

retired.

when he wasn't talking about food he talked

on and on about

retirement.

he never made it to retirement, he died one day while

standing at the sink

filling a glass of water.

he straightened like he'd been

shot.

the glass fell from his hand

and he dropped backwards

landing flat

his necktie slipping to the

left.

afterwards

people said they couldn’t believe

it.

he looked

great.

distinguished white

sideburns, pack of smokes in his

shirt pocket, always cracking

jokes, maybe a little

loud and maybe with a bit of bad

temper

but all in all

a seemingly sound

individual

never missing a day

of work.

working it out

in this steamy a.m. Hades claps its Herpes hands and

a woman sings through my radio, her voice comes clambering

through the smoke, and the wine fumes…

it's a lonely time, she sings, and you're not

mine and it makes me feel so bad,

this thing of being me…

I can hear cars on the freeway, it's like a distant sea

sludged with people

while over my other shoulder, far over on 7th street

near Western

is the hospital, that house of agony—

sheets and bedpans and arms and heads and

expirations;

everything is so sweetly awful, so continuously and

sweetly awful: the art of consummation: life eating

life…

once in a dream I saw a snake swallowing its own

tail, it swallowed and swallowed until

it got halfway round, and there it stopped and
there it stayed, it was stuffed with its own
self. some fix, that.
we only have ourselves to go on, and it's
enough…

I go downstairs for another bottle, switch on the
cable and there's Greg Peck pretending he's
F. Scott and he's very excited and he's reading his
manuscript to his lady.
I turn the set
off.

what kind of writer is that? reading his pages to
a lady? this is a violation…

I return upstairs and my two cats follow me, they are
fine fellows, we have no discontent, we have no
arguments, we listen to the same music, never vote for a
president.
one of my cats, the big one, leaps on the back
of my chair, rubs against my shoulders and
neck.

"no good," I tell him, "I'm not going

to read you this

poem."

he leaps to the floor and walks out to the

balcony and his buddy

follows.

they sit and watch the night; we've got the

power of sanity here.

these early a.m. mornings when almost everybody

is asleep, small night bugs, winged things

enter, and circle and whirl.

the machine hums its electric hum, and having

opened and tasted the new bottle I type the next

line. you

can read it to your lady and she'll probably tell you

it's nonsense. she'll be

reading *Tender Is the*

Night.

beasts bounding through time—

Van Gogh writing his brother for paints

Hemingway testing his shotgun

Celine going broke as a doctor of medicine

the impossibility of being human

Villon expelled from Paris for being a thief

Faulkner drunk in the gutters of his town

the impossibility of being human

Burroughs killing his wife with a gun

Mailer stabbing his

the impossibility of being human

Maupassant going mad in a rowboat

Dostoevsky lined up against a wall to be shot

Crane off the back of a boat into the propeller

the impossibility

Sylvia with her head in the oven like a baked potato

Harry Crosby leaping into that Black Sun

Lorca murdered in the road by the Spanish troops

the impossibility

Artaud sitting on a madhouse bench

Chatterton drinking rat poison

Shakespeare a plagiarist

Beethoven with a horn stuck into his head against deafness

the impossibility the impossibility

Nietzsche gone totally mad

the impossibility of being human

all too human

this breathing

in and out

out and in

these punks

these cowards

these champions

these mad dogs of glory

moving this little bit of light toward

us

impossibly.

trashcan lives

the wind blows hard tonight

and it's a cold wind

and I think about

the boys on the row.

I hope some of them have a bottle

of red.

it's when you're on the row

that you notice that

everything

is owned

and that there are locks on

everything.

this is the way a democracy

works:

you get what you can,

try to keep that

and add to it

if possible.

this is the way a dictatorship

works too

only they either enslave or

destroy their

derelicts.

we just forget

ours.

in either case

it’s a hard

cold

wind.

the lost generation

have been reading a book about a rich literary lady
of the twenties and her husband who
drank, ate and partied their way through
Europe
meeting Pound, Picasso, A. Huxley, Lawrence, Joyce,
F. Scott, Hemingway, many
others;
the famous were like precious toys to
them,
and the way it reads
the famous allowed themselves to become
precious toys.
all through the book
I waited for just *one* of the famous
to tell this rich literary lady and her
rich literary husband to
get off and out
but, apparently, none of them ever
did.

Instead they were photographed with the lady
and her husband
at various seasides
looking intelligent
as if all this was part of the act
of Art.
perhaps because the wife and husband
fronted a lush press that
had something to do
with it.
and they were all photographed together
at parties
or outside of Sylvia Beach's bookshop.
it's true that many of them were

great and/or original artists,
but it all seems such a snobby precious
affair,
and the husband finally committed his
threatened suicide
and the lady published one of my first
short stories in the

40’s and is now

dead, yet

I can’t forgive either of them

for their rich dumb lives

and I can’t forgive their precious toys

either

for being

that.

no help for that

there is a place in the heart that

will never be filled

a space

and even during the

best moments

and

the greatest

times

we will know it

we will know it

more than

ever

there is a place in the heart that

will never be filled

and

we will wait

and

wait

in that

space.

my non-ambitious ambition

my father had little sayings which he mostly shared
during dinner sessions; food made him think of
survival:
“succeed or suck eggs…”
“the early bird gets the worm…”
“early to bed and early to rise makes a man (etc.)…”
“anybody who wants to can make it in America…”
“God takes care of those who (etc.)…”

I had no particular idea who he was talking
to, and personally I thought him a
crazed and stupid brute
but my mother *always* interspersed these
sessions with: “Henry, *listen* to your
father.”

at that age I didn’t have any other
choice
but as the food went down with the
sayings

the appetite and the digestion went
along with them.

it seemed to me that I had never met
another person on earth
as discouraging to my happiness
as my father.

and it appeared that I had
the same effect upon
him.

"You are a *bum*," he told me, "and you'll
always be a *bum*!"

and I thought, if being a bum is to be the
opposite of what this son-of-a-bitch
is, then that's what I'm going to
be.

and it's too bad he's been dead
so long
for now he can't see
how beautifully I've succeeded
at
that.

education

at that small inkwell desk

I had trouble with the words

“sing” and “sign.”

I don’t know why

but

“sing” and “sign”:

it bothered

me.

the others went on and learned

new things

but I just sat there

thinking about

“sing” and “sign.”

there was something there

I couldn’t

overcome.

what it gave me was a

bellyache as

I looked at the backs of all those

heads.

the lady teacher had a

very fierce face

it ran sharply to a

point

and was heavy with white

powder.

one afternoon

she asked my mother to come

see her

and I sat with them

in the classroom

as they

talked.

“he’s not learning

anything,” the teacher

told my

mother.

“please give him a

chance, Mrs. Sims!”

“he’s not *trying*, Mrs.

Chinaski!”

my mother began to

cry.

Mrs. Sims sat there

and watched

her.

it went on for some

minutes.

then Mrs. Sims said,

“well, we’ll see what we

can do…”

then I was walking with

my mother

we were walking in

front of the school,

there was much green grass

and then the

sidewalk.

“oh, Henry,” my mother said,

“your father is so disappointed in

you, I don’t know what we are

going to do!”

father, my mind said,

father and father and

father.

words like that.

I decided not to learn anything

in that

school.

my mother walked along

beside me.

she wasn’t anything at

all.

and I had a bellyache

and even the trees we walked

under

seemed less than

trees

and more like everything

else.

downtown L.A.

throwing your shoe at 3 a.m. and smashing the window, then sticking

your head through the shards of glass and laughing as the phone rings

with authoritative threats as you curse back through the receiver, slam

it down as the woman screeches: “WHAT THE FUCK YA DOIN’, YA ASSHOLE!”

you smirk, look at her (what’s this?), you’re cut somewhere, love it, the

dripping of red onto your dirty torn undershirt, the whiskey roaring

through your invincibility: you’re young, you’re big, and the world

stinks from centuries of Humanity while

you’re on course

and there’s something left to drink—

it’s good, it’s a dramatic farce and you can handle it with

verve, style, grace and elite

mysticism.

another hotel drunk—thank god for hotels and whiskey and ladies of the

street!

you turn to her: “you chippy hunk of shit, don’t bad mouth me! I’m

the toughest guy in town, you don’t know who the hell you’re in this room

with!”

she just looks, half-believing…a cigarette dangling, she’s half-

insane, looking for an out; she’s hard, she’s scared, she’s been

fooled, taken, abused, used, over-

used…

but, under all that, to me she’s the *flower*, I see her as she was

before she was ruined by the lies: theirs and

hers.

to me, she’s new again as I am new: we have a chance

together.

I walk over and fill her drink: “you got class, doll, you’re not like the

others…”

she likes that and I like it too because to make a thing true all you’ve

got to do is believe.

I sit across from her as she tells me about her life, I give her refills,

light her cigarettes, I listen and the City of the Angels

listens: she's had a hard row.

I get sentimental and decide not to fuck her: one more man for her

won't help and one more woman for me won't

matter—besides, she doesn't look that

good.

actually, her life is boring and rather common but most are—mine is too

except when lifted by

whiskey

she gets into a crying-jag, she's cute, really, and pitiful, all she wants

is what she always wanted, only it's getting further and further

away.

then she stops crying, we just drink and smoke, it's

peaceful—I won't bother her that

night…

I have trouble trying to yank the pull-down bed from the

wall, she

comes up to help, we pull together—suddenly, it releases —flings

itelf upon us, a hard death-like mindless object, it knocks us upon

our asses beneath it as

first in fear we scream

then begin laughing, laughing like

crazy.

she gets the bathroom first, then I use it, then we stretch out and

sleep.

I am awakened in the early morning…she is down at my center, she has

me in her mouth and is working furiously.

“it’s all right,” I say, “you don’t have to do

that.”

she continues, finishes…

in the morning we pass the desk clerk, he has on thick-rimmed dark glasses,

seems to sit in the shade of some tarantula dream: he was there when we

entered, he is there now: some eternal darkness, we are almost to the door

when he says:

“don’t come back.”

we walk 2 blocks up, turn left, walk one block, then one block south, enter

Willie’s at the middle of the

block, place ourselves at bar

center.

we order beer for starters, we sit there as she searches her purse for

cigarettes, then I get up, move toward the juke box, put a coin

within, come back, sit down, she lifts her glass, “the first one’s best,”

and I lift my drink, “and the last…”

outside, the traffic runs up and down, down and

up,

going

nowhere.

another casualty

cat got run over

now silver screw holding together a broken

femur

right leg

bound in bright red

bandage

got cat home from vet's

took my eye off

him for

a moment

he ran across floor

dragging his red

leg

chasing the female

cat

worst thing the

fucker could

do

he’s in the penalty

box

now

sweating it

out

he’s just like the

rest of

us

he has these large

yellow eyes

staring

only wanting to

live the

good

life.

driving test

drivers

in defense and anger

often give the

finger

to those

who become involved in their

driving problems.

I am aware what the

signal of the finger

implies

yet when it is directed

at me

sometimes

I can’t help laughing at

the florid

twisted

faces

and

the gesture.

yet today

I found myself

giving the finger

to some guy

who pulled directly

into my lane

without waiting

from a supermarket

exit.

I shook the finger at

him.

he saw it

and I drove along right on his

rear

bumper.

it was my first

time.

I was a member of the

club

and I felt like a

fucking

fool.

that's why funerals are so sad

he's got all the tools but he's lazy, has no

fire, the ladies drain his senses, his

emotions, he just wants to drive his

flashy car

he gets a wax job once a month

throws away his shoes when they get

scuffed

but

he's got the best right hand in the

business

and his left hook can cave in a man's ribs

if I can get him to do it

but

he has no god damned imagination

he's in the top ten

but the music is missing.

he makes the money

but it's all going to get away from

him.

some day he's not going to be able to do

even the little

he's doing now.

his idea of victory is to pull down as

many women's panties as he

can.

he's

champ at that.

and when you see me screaming at him

in his corner between

rounds

I'm trying to awaken him to the fact that

the TIME is

NOW.

he just grins at me:

"hell, *you* fight him, he's a

bitch…"

you have no idea, cousin, how many

men

can do it

but

won’t.

cornered

well, they said it would come to

this: old. talent gone. fumbling for

the word

hearing the dark

footsteps, I turn

look behind me…

not yet, old dog…

soon enough.

now

they sit talking about

me: “yes, it’s happened, he’s

finished…it’s

sad…”

“he never had a great deal, did

he?”

“well, no, but now…”

now

they are celebrating my demise

in taverns I no longer

frequent.

now

I drink alone

at this malfunctioning

machine

as the shadows assume

shapes

I fight the slow

retreat

now

my once-promise

dwindling

dwindling

now

lighting new cigarettes

pouring more

drinks

it has been a beautiful

fight

still

is.

bumming with Jane

there wasn't a stove

and we put cans of beans

in hot water in the sink

to heat them

up

and we read the Sunday papers

on Monday

after digging them out of the

trash cans

but somehow we managed

money for wine

and the

rent

and the money came off

the streets

out of hock shops

out of nowhere

and all that mattered

was the next

bottle

and we drank and sang

and

fought

were in and out

of drunk

tanks

car crashes

hospitals

we barricaded ourselves

against the

police

and the other roomers

hated

us

and the desk clerk

of the hotel

feared

us

and it went on

and

on

and it was one of the

most wonderful times

of my

life.

darkness

darkness falls upon Humanity

and faces become terrible

things

that wanted more than there

was.

all our days are marked with

unexpected

affronts—some

disastrous, others

less so

but the process is

wearing and

continuous.

attrition rules.

most give

way

leaving

empty spaces

where people should

be.

our progenitors, our
educational systems, the
land, the media, the
way
have
deluded and misled the
masses: they have been
defeated
by the aridity of
the *actual*
dream.

they were
unaware that
achievement or victory or
luck or
whatever the hell you
want to call
it
must have
its defeats.

it’s only the re-gathering and

going on

which lends substance

to whatever magic

might possibly

evolve.

and now

as we ready to self-destruct

there is very little left to

kill

which makes the tragedy

less and more

much much

more.

termites of the page

the problem that I've found with

most poets that I have known is that

they've never had an 8 hour job

and there is nothing

that will put a person

more in touch

with the realities

than

an 8 hour job.

most of these poets

that I have known

have

seemingly existed on

air alone

but

it hasn't been truly

so:

behind them has been

a family member

usually a wife or mother

supporting these

souls

and

so it’s no wonder

they have written so

poorly:

they have been protected

against the actualities

from the

beginning

and they

understand nothing

but the ends of their

fingernails

and

their delicate

hairlines

and

their lymph

nodes.

their words are

unlived, unfurnished, un-

true, and worse—so

fashionably

dull.

soft and safe

they gather together to

plot, hate,

gossip, most of these

American poets

pushing and hustling their

talents

playing at

greatness.

poet (?):

that word needs re-

defining.

when I hear that

word

I get a rising in the

gut

as if I were about to

puke.

let them have the

stage

so long

as I need not be

in the

audience.

a good time

now look, she said, stretched out on the bed, I don't want anything

personal, let's just do it, I don't want to get involved, got

it?

she kicked off her high-heeled shoes…

sure, he said, standing there, let's just pretend that we've

already done it, there's nothing less involved than that, is

there?

what the hell do you mean? she asked.

I mean, he said, I'd rather drink

anyhow.

and he poured himself one.

it was a lousy night in Vegas and he walked to the window and

looked out at the dumb lights.

you a fag? she asked, you a god damned

fag?

no, he said.

you don’t have to get shitty, she said, just because you lost at

the tables—we drove all the way here to have a good time and

now look at you: sucking at that booze, you coulda done that in

L.A.!

right, he said, one thing I do like to get involved with is the

fucking bottle.

I want you to take me home, she said.

my pleasure, he said, let’s

go.

it was one of those times where nothing was lost because nothing

had ever been found and as she got dressed it was sad for

him

not because of him and the lady but because of all the millions

like him and the lady

as the lights blinked out there, everything so effortlessly

false.

she was ready, fast: let’s get the hell out of here, she

said.

right, he said, and they walked out the door together.

the still trapeze

Saroyan told his wife, “I’ve got to
gamble in order to
write.” she told him to
go ahead.

he lost $350,000.00
mostly at the racetrack
but still couldn’t write *or*
pay his taxes.

he ran from the govt. and exiled himself
in Paris.

he later came back, sweated it
out
in hock up to his
ass—
royalties dropping
off.

he still couldn’t write or
what he wrote didn’t

work

because that tremendous

brave optimism

that buoyed everybody up

so well

during the depression

just turned to

sugar water

during

good times.

he died

a dwindling legend

with a huge handlebar

mustache

just like his father

used to have

in the old Fresno

Armenian way

in a world that

could no longer

use

William.

January

here

you see this

hand

here you see this

sky

this

bridge

hear this

sound

the agony of the

elephant

the nightmare of the

midget

while

caged parrots

sit in a

flourish of

color

while pieces of

people

fall over the

edge

like pebbles

like

rocks

madhouses screaming in

pain

as the royalty of the

world is

photographed

say

on horseback

or

say

watching a procession

in their

honor

as

the junkies junk

as the alkies drink

as the whores whore

as the killers kill

the albatross blinks its

eyes

the weather stays

mostly

the same.

sunny side down

NOTHING. sitting in a cafe having breakfast. NOTHING. the waitress,

and the people eating. the traffic runs by. doesn't matter what

Napoleon did, what Plato said. Turgenev could have been a fly. we are worn-

down, hope stamped out. we reach for coffee cups like the robots about

to replace us. courage at Salerno, bloodbaths on the Eastern front didn't

matter. we know that we are beaten. NOTHING. now it's just a matter of

continuing

anyhow—

chew the food and read the paper. we

read about ourselves. the news is

bad. something about

NOTHING.

Joe Louis long dead as the medfly invades Beverly Hills.

well, at least we can sit and

eat. it's been some rough

trip. it could be

worse. it could be worse than

NOTHING.

let’s get more coffee from the

waitress.

that *bitch*! she knows we are trying to get her

attention.

she just stands there doing

NOTHING.

it doesn’t matter if Prince Charles falls off his horse

or that the hummingbird is so seldom

seen

or that we are too senseless to go

insane.

coffee. give us more of that NOTHING

coffee.

the man in the brown suit

fuck, he was small

maybe 5-3,

135 pounds,

I didn't like

him,

he sat there at his desk

at the

bank

and as I waited in line

he seemed to have a way

of glancing at

me

and I stared

back,

I don't know what

it was

that caused the

animosity.

he had this little mustache

that drooped

at the ends,

he was in his mid-forties

and like most people who worked

in banks

he had a non-committal

yet self-important

personality.

one day I almost went

over the railing

to ask him

what the hell

was he looking

at?

today I went in

and stood in line

and saw him leave his

desk.

one of the lady tellers was

having a problem

with a man

at her

window

and the man

in the brown suit

began to hold

counsel with both of

them.

suddenly

the man in the brown suit

vaulted the

railing

got behind the other

man

wrapped his arms

about him

then dragged him along

to a latch

entrance

along the railing

reached over

unhooked the latch

while still managing to

hold the

man.

then he dragged him

in there

latched the

gate

and while holding the

man

he told one of the

girls,

“Phone the

police.”

the man he was holding was

about 20, black, a good 6-2,

maybe 190 pounds,

and I thought, hey,

break loose, man, jail is a

long time.

but he just stood

there

being

held.

I left before the

police

arrived.

the next time

I went to the bank

the man in the brown suit

was behind his

desk.

and when he glanced at

me

I smiled just a

little.

a magician, gone…

they go one by one and as they do it gets closer

to me and

I don't mind that so much, it's

just that I can't be practical about the

mathematics that take others

to the vanishing point.

last Saturday

one of racing's greatest harness drivers

died—little Joe O'Brien.

I had seen him win many a

race. he

had a peculiar rocking motion

he flicked the reins

and rocked his body back and

forth. he

applied this motion

during the stretch run and

it was quite dramatic and

effective…

he was so small that he couldn't
lay the whip on as hard as the
others
so
he rocked and rocked
in the sulky
and the horse felt the lightning
of his excitement
that rhythmic crazy rocking was
transferred from man to
beast…
the whole thing had the feel of a

crapshooter calling to the
gods, and the gods
so often answered…

I saw Joe O'Brien win
endless photo finishes
many by a
nose.
he'd take a horse
another driver couldn't get a

run out of

and Joe would put his touch

to it

and the animal would

most often respond with

a flurry of wild energy.

Joe O'Brien was the finest harness driver

I had ever seen

and I'd seen many over the

decades.

nobody could nurse and cajole

a trotter or a pacer

like little Joe

nobody could make the magic work

like Joe.

they go one by one

presidents

garbage men

killers

actors

pickpockets

boxers

hit men

ballet dancers

fishermen

doctors

fry cooks

like

that

but Joe O’Brien

it’s going to be hard

hard

to find a replacement for

little Joe

and

at the ceremony

held for him

at the track tonight

(Los Alamitos 10-1-84)

as the drivers gathered in a

circle

in their silks

at the finish line

I had to turn my back

to the crowd

and climb the upper grandstand

steps

to the wall

so the people wouldn’t

see me

cry.

well, that's just the way it is…

sometimes when everything seems at

its worst

when all conspires

and gnaws

and the hours, days, weeks

years

seem wasted—

stretched there upon my bed

in the dark

looking upward at the ceiling

I get what many will consider an

obnoxious thought:

it's still nice to be

Bukowski.

the chemistry of things

I always thought Mary Lou was skinny and
not much to look at
while almost all the other guys
thought she was a
hot number.
maybe that's why she hung around me
in Jr. High.
my indifference must have attracted
her.

I was cool and mean in those days
and when the guys asked me,
"you banged Mary Lou yet?"
I answered them with the
truth: "she
bores me."

there was this guy
he taught chemistry.
Mr. Humm. Humm wore a little bow

tie and a black coat, a
cheap wrinkled job, he was
supposed to have
brains

and one day Mary Lou came to
me
and said Humm kept her
after class
and had taken her into the
closet and
kissed her and
fondled her

panties.
she was crying, “what will I
do?”

“forget it,” I told her,
“those chemicals have scrambled
his brain. we have an English teacher
who hikes her skirt up around her
hips every day and wants to go to bed with
every guy in class. we enjoy her but

ignore her.”

“why don’t you beat Mr. Humm up?”

she asked me.

“I could but they’d transfer me to

Stuart Hall.”

in Stuart Hall they beat the shit

out of you

and they ignored math, English,

music, they just stuck you into auto

shop

where you fixed up old cars

which they resold at big

profits.

“I thought you cared for me,” said Mary

Lou, “don’t you realize he

kissed me, stuck his tongue down my

throat and had his hand up my

behind?”

“well,” I said, “we saw Mrs. Lattimore’s

pussy the other day, in English.”

Mary Lou walked off

crying…

well, she told her

mother and Humm got his, he

had to

resign, poor son of a

bitch.

after that the guys asked me,

“hey, what do you think of Humm

sticking his hand up your girl’s

ass?”

“just another guy with no

taste,” I answered.

I was cool and mean

in those days and I went on to

high school, the same one

Mary Lou attended

where she secretly got

married

during her senior year

to a guy

I knew, a guy I
outdrank and beat the shit out of
a couple of
times.

the guy thought he had
something.
he wanted me to be
best man.

I told him, no thanks and lots of
luck.

I never could see what
they saw in
Mary Lou.
and poor Humm: what a
lonely sick old
fart.

anyhow, then I went on to
city college
where the only molesting I
could see going on
was what they did to your

mind.

rift

“I can’t live with you anymore,”

she said,

“*look* at you!”

“uuh?” I

asked.

“*look* at you!

sitting in that god

damned

chair!

your belly is sticking out

of your

underwear,

you’ve burnt cigarette

holes in all your

shirts!

all you *do* is suck

on that god damned

beer,

bottle after bottle,

what do you get out of

that?”

“the damage has been

done,” I told

her.

“what’re you talking

about?”

“nothing matters and

we know nothing matters

and *that*

matters…”

“you’re drunk!”

“come on, baby, let’s get

along, it’s

easy…”

“not for *me*!” she screamed,

“not for

me!”

she ran into the bathroom to

put on her

makeup.

I got up for another

beer.

I sat back down

just had the new bottle

to my mouth

when she came out of the

bathroom.

“holy shit!” she screamed,

“you’re

disgusting!”

I laughed right into the

bottle, gagged, spit a mouthful of

beer across my

undershirt.

“my god!” she

said.

she slammed the door and

was gone.

I looked at the closed door

and at the doorknob

and strangely

I didn’t feel

alone.

my friend, the parking lot attendant

—he's a dandy

—small black mustache

—usually sucking on a cigar

he tends to lean into the cars as he

transacts business

first time I met him, he said,

"hey! ya gonna make a

killin'?"

"maybe," I answered.

next meeting it was:

"hey, Ramrod! what's

happening?"

"very little," I told

him.

next time I had my girlfriend with me

and he just

grinned.

next time I was

alone.

“hey,” he asked, “where’s the young

chick?”

“I left her at home…”

“*Bullshit*! I’ll bet she dumped

you!”

and the next time

he really leaned into the car:

“what’s a guy like *you* doing driving a

BMW? I’ll bet you inherited your

money, you didn’t get this car with your

brains!”

“how’d you guess?” I

answered.

that was some weeks ago.

I haven’t seen him lately.

fellow like that, chances are he just moved on

to better

things.

miracle

I have just listened to this

symphony which Mozart dashed off

in one day

and it had enough wild and crazy

joy to last

forever,

whatever forever

is

Mozart came as close as

possible to

that.

a non-urgent poem

I had this fellow write me that

he felt there wasn't the

"urgency" in my poems

of the present

as compared to my poems

of the past.

now, if this *is* true

why did he write me

about it?

have I made his days

more

incomplete?

it's

possible.

well, I too have felt

let down

by writers

I once thought were

powerful

or

at least

very damned

good

but

I never considered

writing them to

inform them that I

sensed their

demise.

I found the best thing

I could do

was just to type away

at my own work

and let the dying

die

as they always

have.

my first affair with that older woman

when I look back now

at the abuse I took from

her

I feel shame that I was so

innocent,

but I must say

she did match me drink for

drink,

and I realized that her life

her feelings for things

had been ruined

along the way

and that I was no more than a

temporary

companion;

she was ten years older

and mortally hurt by the past

and the present;

she treated me badly:

desertion, other

men;

she brought me immense

pain,

continually;

she lied, stole;

there was desertion,

other men,

yet we had our moments; and

our little soap opera ended

with her in a coma

in the hospital,

and I sat at her bed

for hours

talking to her,

and then she opened her eyes

and saw me:

“I knew it would be you,”

she said.

then she closed her

eyes.

the next day she was

dead.

I drank alone

for two years

after that.

the freeway life

some fool kept blocking me and I finally got around him, and in the

elation of freedom I ran it up to 85 (naturally, first checking the rear

view for our blue suited protectors); then I felt and heard the SMASH of a hard

object upon the bottom of my car, but wanting to make the track I willed

myself to ignore it (as if that would make it vanish) even though I began

to smell gasoline.

I checked the gas gauge and it *seemed* to be holding…

it had been a terrible week already

but, you know, defeat can strengthen just as victory can weaken, and if

you have the proper luck and the holy endurance the gods just *might* deliver

the proper admixture…

then

traffic backed up and stopped, and then I really smelled gas and I saw my

gas gauge dipping rapidly, then my radio told me that a man

3 miles up

on the Vernon overpass had one leg over the side and was threatening

suicide,

and there I was threatened with being blown to hell

as people yelled at me that my tank was broken and pouring gasoline;

yes, I nodded back, I know, I know…

meanwhile, waving cars off and working my way over to the outer lane

thinking, they are more terrorized than I am:

if I go, those nearby might go also.

there was no motion in the traffic—the suicide was still trying to make

up his mind and my gas gauge dipped into the red

and then the necessity of being a proper citizen and waiting for opportunity

vanished and I made my move

up and over a cement abutment

bending my right front wheel

I made it to the freeway exit which was totally

clear

then worked on down to a gas station on Imperial Highway

parked it

still dripping gas, got out, made it to the phone, got in a call

for the tow truck, not a long wait at all, nice drive back in with a black

fellow who told me strange stories about stranded motorists…

(like one woman, her hands were frozen to the wheel, took 15 minutes of

talking and prying to make her let go.)

had the car back in a couple of days, was driving back from the track,

hit the brake and it wouldn't go down, luckily I wasn't on the freeway

yet, cut the ignition, glided to the curb, noted that the steering

column cover had ripped loose and blocked the brake, ripped that away, then

ripped some more to make sure, then a whole mass of wires spilled out,

s h i t…

I turned the key, hit the gas but the car STARTED

and I drove off with the dangling wires against my leg

thinking

do these things happen to other

people or am

I just the chosen one?

I decided it was the latter and got onto the freeway where

some guy in a volks swung over and blocked my

lane

whereupon I swung around the son-of-a-bitch and hit

75, 80, 85…

thinking, the courage it took to get out of bed each

morning

to face the same things

over and over

was

enormous.

the player

I had 40 win on the 6 horse

he had 2 lengths in the stretch

was running along the rail

when the jock whipped him

right-handed

and the horse hit the wood

spilled

threw the jock

and there went the race

for me.

that was the 7th race

and I considered that the horse

might have lost

anyhow

and then I considered leaving

but I decided to play the

8th,

hit 20 win on a 5 to one

shot.

in the 9th I went 40 win

on the second favorite

and when the bell rang to start them

the horse reared and

left my jock

in the stall.

I took the escalator down

and walked out the

gate

where a young man asked me

for a dollar so he could

take the bus

home.

I gave him the buck and

told him,

“you ought to stay away from this

place.”

“yeah,” he said, “I

know.”

then I walked toward parking

searching my coat for

cigarettes.

nothing.

p.o. box 11946, Fresno, Calif. 93776

drove in from the track after losing $50.

a hot day out there

they pack them in on a Saturday;

my feet hurt and I had pains in the neck

and about the shoulders—

nerves: large crowds of people more than

unsettle me.

pulled into the driveway and got the

mail

moved up and parked it

went in and opened the IRS letter

form 525 (SC) (Rev. 9-83)

read it

and was informed that I owed

TWELVE THOUSAND SIXHUNDREDFOUR DOLLARS AND

SEVENTY EIGHT CENTS

on my 1981 income tax plus

TWO THOUSAND EIGHTHUNDREDEIGHTYTHREE DOLLARS

AND TWELVE CENTS interest

and that further interest was being

compounded

DAILY.

I went into the kitchen and poured a

drink.

life in America was a curious

thing.

well, I *could* let the interest

build

that's what the government

did

but after a while they would

come for me

or whatever I had

left.

at least that $50 loss at the

track didn't look so

bad anymore.

I'd have to go tomorrow and

win $15,487.90 plus

daily compounded

interest.

I drank to that,

wishing I had purchased a

Racing Form

on the way

out.

poor Al

I don't know how he does it
but every woman he meets is
crazy.
he will get rid of one
crazy woman
but he never gets any
relief—
another crazy moves right in
with him.

it's only after they move in
and begin acting
more than strange
that they admit to him
that they've done madhouse
time
or that their families have
a long history of mental
illness.

his last one

he sent to a shrink

once a week:

$75 for 45 minutes.

after 7 months

she walked out on the

shrink

and said to Al,

“that god damned fag doesn’t know

anything.”

I don’t know how they all find

Al.

he says you can’t tell at the first

meeting

they have their guard up

but after 2 or 3 months the

guard comes down

and there’s Al with

another one.

It got so bad that Al thought

maybe it was

him

so he went to a shrink

and asked

and the shrink said,

“you’re one of the sanest men

I’ve ever met.”

poor Al.

that made him feel

worse

than ever.

for my ivy league friends:

many of those I met on the reading circuit or heard about on the reading

circuit in the old days are now either teaching or poets-in-residence

and have garnered Guggenheims and N.E.A.'s and sundry other grants.

well, I tried for a Gugg once myself, even got an N.E.A. so I can't

knock the act

but

you should have seen them back then: raggedy-ass, wild-eyed, raving

against the order

now

they have been ingested, digested, rested

they write reviews for the journals

they write well-worked, quiet, inoffensive poesy

they edit so many of the magazines that I have no idea where I should send this

poem

since they attack my work with alarming regularity

and

I can't read theirs

yet their attacks upon me have been effective in this country

and

if it weren't for Europe I'd probably still be a starving writer

or down at the row

or diggin weeds out of your garden

or…?

well

you know the old saying: it's all a matter of

taste

and

either they're right and I'm wrong or I'm right and they're all

wrong

or

maybe it's some place in between.

most of the people in the world could care less

and

I often feel the same

way.

helping the old

I was standing in line at the bank today
when the old fellow in front of me
dropped his glasses (luckily, within the
case)
and as he bent over
I saw how difficult it was for
him
and I said, “wait, let me get
them…”
but as I picked them up
he dropped his cane
a beautiful, black polished
cane
and I got the glasses back to him
then went for the cane
steadying the old boy
as I handed him his cane.
he didn’t speak,
he just smiled at me.

then he turned

forward.

I stood behind him waiting

my turn.

bad times at the 3rd and Vermont hotel

Alabam was a sneak and a thief and he came to my

room when I was drunk and

each time I got up he shoved me back

down.

you prick, I told him, you know I can

take you!

he just shoved me down

again.

when I sober up, I said, I'm going to kick you

all the way to hell!

he just kept pushing me

around.

I finally caught him a good one, right over the

temple

and he backed off and

left.

it was a couple of days later

I got even: I fucked his
girl.

then I went down and knocked on his
door.

well, Alabam, I fucked your woman and now I'm going to
kick you all the way to
hell!

the poor guy started crying, he put his hands over his
face and just cried

I stood there and watched
him.

I said, I'm sorry,
Alabam.

then I left him there, I went back to
my room.

we were all alkies and none of us had jobs, all we had
was each other.

even then, my so-called woman was in some bar or
somewhere, I hadn't seen her in a couple of
days.

I had a bottle of port

left.

I uncorked it and took it down to Alabam's

room.

said, how about a drink,

Rebel?

he looked up, stood up, went for two

glasses.

the Master Plan

starving in a Philadelphia winter

trying to be a writer

I wrote and wrote and drank and drank and

drank

and then stopped writing and concentrated on

the drinking.

it was another

art-form.

if you can't have any luck with one thing you

try another.

of course, I had been practicing on the

drinking-form

since the age of

15.

and there was much competition

in that field

also.

it was a world full of drunks and writers and

drunk writers.

and so

I became a starving drunk instead of a starving

writer.

the best thing was the instant

result.

and I soon became the biggest and

best drunk in the neighborhood and

maybe the whole

city.

it sure as hell beat sitting around waiting for

those rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

of course, I never really considered quitting the

writing game, I just wanted to give it a

ten year rest

figuring if I got famous too early

I wouldn't have anything left for the stretch run

like I have now, thank

you,

with the drinking still thrown

in.

garbage

I had taken a tremendous beating,

I had chosen a real bull, and because of

the girls and for himself and just because of his

brutal escaping energy

he had almost murdered me:

I learned later

that even after I was out

he had kicked my head again and

again

and then had emptied several garbage cans

over me

and then they had left me there

in that alley.

I was the guy from out of town.

it was around 6 a.m. on a Sunday

morning when I came

around.

my face was a mass of

bruises, scabs, clots, bumps, lumps, my lips

thick and numb, my eyes almost swollen

shut

but I got to my feet and began

walking;

I could see traces of the sun, houses, the shaking

sidewalk as I

moved toward my room

then I heard shuffling sounds from the

center of the street

and I forced my eyes to

focus and saw this

man staggering

his clothing ripped and bloody

he smelled of death and darkness

but he kept moving forward

down the middle of the street

as if he had been walking for

miles

from some event so ugly that

the mind itself might refuse to accept it

as part of life.

my impulse was to help him

and I stepped off the

curbing

and moved toward him.

he couldn't see me, he moved forward

looking for somewhere to go,

anywhere, and

I saw one of his eyes hanging

out of the socket,

dangling.

I backed away.

he was like a creature not of the

earth.

I let him go

by.

I heard him moving away

behind me

those blind steps

lurching, in

agony,

senselessly

alone.

I got back on the

sidewalk.

I got back to my

room.

I got myself to the

bed.

fell face up

the ceiling up there above me,

I waited.

my vanishing act

when I got sick of the bar

and I sometimes did

I had a place to go:

it was a tall field of grass

an abandoned

graveyard.

I didn't consider this to be a

morbid pastime.

it just seemed to be the best

place to be.

it offered a generous cure to

the vicious hangover.

through the grass I could see

the stones,

many were tilted

at strange angles

against gravity

as though they must

fall

but I never saw one

fall

although there were many of those

in the yard.

it was cool and dark

with a breeze

and I often slept

there.

I was never

bothered.

each time I returned to the bar

after an absence

it was always the same with

them:

“where the hell you

been? we thought you

died!”

I was their bar freak, they needed me

to make themselves feel

better.

just like, at times, I needed that

graveyard.

let’s make a deal

in conjunction with

these rivers of shit

that keep rolling through my brain, Captain

Walrus, I can only say that I hardly understand

it and would say

any number of HAIL MARYS

to put a stop to it—

I’d even go back to living with that whore with the

heart of brass just

to keep these rivers of shit from rolling through my

brain, Captain Walrus, but

of course

I would never stop playing the horses or

drinking

but

Captain

to keep these rivers from flowing

I’d promise to never

eat eggs again and

I'd shave my head and my balls, I'd live in
the state of Delaware and I'd even
force myself to sit through any movie acted in by
any member of the Fonda
family.

think about it, Captain Walrus, the
plum is in the pudding and the parasol bends to
the West wind
I've got to do something about all
this…
it seems like it never
stops.

each man's hell is in a different
place: mine is just up and
behind
my ruined
face.

16-bit Intel 8088 chip

with an Apple Macintosh

you can't run Radio Shack programs

in its disc drive.

nor can a Commodore 64

drive read a file

you have created on an

IBM Personal Computer.

both Kaypro and Osborne computers use

the CP/M operating system

but can't read each other's

handwriting

for they format (write

on) discs in different

ways.

the Tandy 2000 runs MS-DOS but

can't use most programs produced for

the IBM Personal Computer

unless certain

bits and bytes are

altered

but the wind still blows over

Savannah

and in the Spring

the turkey buzzard struts and

flounces before his

hens.

zero

sitting here watching the second hand on the TIMEX go around and

around…

this will hardly be a night to remember

sitting here searching for blackheads on the back of my neck

as other men enter the sheets with dolls of flame

I look into myself and find perfect emptiness.

I am out of cigarettes and don't even have a gun to point.

this writer's block is my only possession.

the second hand on the TIMEX still goes around and

around…

I always wanted to be a writer

now I'm one who can't.

might as well go downstairs and watch late night tv with the wife

she'll ask me how it went

I'll wave a hand nonchalantly

settle down next to her

and watch the glass people fail

as I have failed.

I’m going to walk down the stairway now

what a sight:

an empty man being careful not to trip and bang his empty

head.

putrefaction

of late

I've had this thought

that this country

has gone backwards

4 or 5 decades

and that all the

social advancement

the good feeling of

person toward

person

has been washed

away

and replaced by the same

old

bigotries.

we have

more than ever

the selfish wants of power

the disregard for the

weak

the old

the impoverished

the

helpless.

we are replacing want with

war

salvation with

slavery.

we have wasted the

gains

we have become

rapidly

less.

we have our Bomb

it is our fear

our damnation

and our

shame.

now

something so sad

has hold of us

that

the breath

leaves

and we can’t even

cry.

I'll take it...

maybe I'm going crazy, that's all right
but these poems keep rising to the top of my
head with more and more
force. now
after the oceans of booze that I have
consumed
it would only seem that attrition would
be my rightful reward as I continue to
consume—while
the madhouses, skidrows and graveyards are
filled with the likes of
me—
yet each night as I sit down to this machine
with my bottle
the poems flare and jump out, on and
on—roaring in the glee of
easy power: 65 years
dancing—my mouth curling into a
tiny grin

as these keys keep meting out a
substantial energy of cock-
eyed miracle.

the gods have been kind to me through this
life-style that would have killed
an ox of a man
and I'm no ox of a
man.

I sensed from the beginning, of
course, that there was a strange gnawing
inside of me

but I never dreamed this
luck
this absolute shot of
grace

my death will at most seem
an
afterthought.

supposedly famous

not much to hang onto in this early morning growling,
my wife, poor dear, downstairs,
I am at the racetrack all day and
up here all night with the bottle and
this machine.
my wife, poor dear, may she find her place
in heaven.

then too
the few people that I have
known, the people I thought had that
little extra flare
that inventive humanity, well, they
dissolved
but
being a natural loner
I am not over-
distraught—
there are still my 5
cats: Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and

Blob.

not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.

I am now a

supposedly famous

writer

influencing hordes of

typists.

would

that I could

laugh

at all

this.

Fame is the last whore, all the others are

gone.

well, the competition ain't been

much

but that's no hair off my

wrists: I realized all that

long ago while

starving and

pissing out the

window

while smashing waterglasses of

booze against the behind-in-the-

rent

walls.

Ting, Ding, Beeker, Bleeker and

Blob.

now Death is a plant growing in my

mind

not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.

I am sad for the dead and I am sad for the living

but not for my 5 cats or

for my wife, my wife who will

find her place in

heaven.

and as for the people

dissolved

I didn't dissolve them, they dissolved

themselves.

and that the sidewalks are empty while

full of feet

passing—

this is the working of the

way.

not much to hang on to

as

a man plays a piano

through my radio and

the walls

stand up and

down

as the courage of everything

even the fleas

the lice

the tarantula

astounds me

in this early morning

growling.

the last shot

here we are, once again, the last drink, the last

poem—decades of this splendid luck—another drunken

a.m., and not on the drunktank floor tonight waiting for

the black pimp to get off the phone so I can put through my one

allowed call (so many of those a.m.s too) it took

me a long time to find the most interesting person to

drink with: myself, like this, now reaching to my left

for the last glass of the Blood of the

Lamb.

whorehouse

my first experience in a whorehouse

was in Tijuana.

it was a large place on the edge of

the city.

I was 17, with two friends.

we got drunk to get our guts

up

then went on

in.

the place was packed with

servicemen

mostly

sailors.

the sailors stood in long

lines

hollering, and beating on

the doors.

Lance got in a short

line (the lines indicated the

age of the whore: the shorter the
line the older the
whore)
and got it over
with, came out bold and
grinning: “well, what you guys
waiting for?”

the other guy, Jack, he passed me
the tequila bottle and I took a
hit and passed it back and he
took a hit.

Lance looked at us: “I’ll be
in the car, sleeping it
off.”

Jack and I waited until he was
gone
then started walking toward the
exit.
Jack was wearing this big
sombrero
and right at the exit was an

old whore sitting in a

chair.

she stuck out her leg

barring our

way: “come on, boys, I’ll make

it *good* for you and

cheap!”

somehow that scared the

shit out of Jack and he

said, “my god, I’m going to

PUKE!”

“NOT ON THE FLOOR!” screamed

the whore

and with that

Jack ripped off his

sombrero

and holding it

before him

he must have puked a

gallon.

then he just stood there

staring down

at it

and the whore

said, “get out of

here!”

Jack ran out the door with

his sombrero

and then the whore

got a very kind look upon her

face and said to me:

“*cheap*!” and I walked

into a room with her

and there was a big fat man

sitting in a chair and

I asked her, “who’s

that?”

and she said, “he’s here to

see that I don’t get

hurt.”

and I walked over to the

man and said, “hey, how ya

doin'?"

and he said, "fine,

señor…"

and I said,

"you live around

here?"

and he said, "give

her the

money."

"how much?"

"two dollars."

I gave the lady the two

dollars

then walked back to the

man.

"I might come and live

in Mexico some day," I

told him.

"get the hell out of

here," he said,

“NOW!”

as I walked through the

exit

Jack was waiting out there

without his

sombrero

but he was still

wavering

drunk.

“Christ,” I said, “she was

great, she actually got my

balls into her

mouth!”

we walked back to the car.

Lance was passed out, we

awakened him and he drove us

out of

there

somehow

we got through the border

crossing

and all the way
driving back to
L.A.

we rode Jack for being a
chickenshit
virgin.
Lance did it in a gentle
manner
but I was loud
demeaning Jack for his lack of
guts
and I kept at it
until Jack passed out
near
San Clemente.

I sat up there next to
Lance as we passed the last
tequila bottle back and
forth.

as Los Angeles rushed toward
us

Jack asked, “how was

it?”

and I answered

in a worldly

tone: “I’ve had

better.”

starting fast

we each

at times

should

remember

the most

elevated

and

lucky

moment

of

our

lives.

for me

it

was

being

a

very young

man

and

sleeping

penniless

and

friendless

upon a

park

bench

in a

strange

city

which

doesn’t say

much

for all

those

many

decades

which

followed.

the crazy truth

the nut in the red outfit

came walking down the street

talking to himself

when a hotshot in a sports car

cut into an alley

in front of the nut

who hollered, “HEY, DOG DRIP!

SWINE SHIT! YOU GOT PEANUTS FOR

BRAINS?”

the hotshot braked his sports

car, backed toward the nut,

stopped,

said: “WHAT’S THAT YOU SAID,

BUDDY?”

“I said, YOU BETTER

DRIVE OFF WHILE YOU CAN,

ASSHOLE!”

the hotshot had his girl in the

car with him and started to
open the door.

“YOU BETTER NOT GET OUT OF THAT
CAR, PEANUT BRAIN!”

the door closed and the sports car
roared
off.

the nut in the red outfit then
continued to walk down the
street.

“THERE AIN’T NOTHIN’ NOWHERE,”
he said, “AND IT’S GETTING TO BE
LESS THAN NOTHING ALL THE
TIME!”

it was a great day
there on 7th Street just off
Weymouth
Drive.

drive through hell

the people are weary, unhappy and frustrated, the people are

bitter and vengeful, the people are deluded and fearful, the

people are angry and uninventive

and I drive among them on the freeway and they project

what is left of themselves in their manner of driving—

some more hateful, more thwarted than others—

some don't like to be passed, some attempt to keep others

from passing

—some attempt to block lane changes

—some hate cars of a newer, more expensive model

—others in these cars hate the older cars.

the freeway is a circus of cheap and petty emotions, it's

humanity on the move, most of them coming from some place they

hated and going to another they hate just as much or

more.

the freeways are a lesson in what we have become and

most of the crashes and deaths are the collision

of incomplete beings, of pitiful and demented

lives.

when I drive the freeways I see the soul of humanity of

my city and it's ugly, ugly, ugly: the living have choked the

heart

away.

for the concerned:

if you get married they think you're

finished

and if you are without a woman they think you're

incomplete.

a large portion of my readers want me to

keep writing about bedding down with madwomen and

streetwalkers—

also, about being in jails and hospitals, or

starving or

puking my guts

out.

I agree that complacency hardly engenders an

immortal literature

but neither does

repetition.

for those readers now

sick at heart

believing that I'm a contented

man—

please have some

cheer: agony sometimes changes

form

but

it never ceases for

anybody.

a funny guy

Schopenhauer couldn't abide the masses,

they drove him mad

but he was able to say,

"at least, I am not them."

and this consoled him to some

extent

and I think one of his most humorous writings

was when he expostulated against some man who

uselessly cracked his whip

over his horse

completely destroying a thought process

Arthur was involved

in.

but the man with the whip was a part of the

whole

no matter how seemingly useless and

stupid

and once great thoughts

often with time

become useless and

stupid.

but Schopenhauer’s rage was so

beautiful

so well placed that I laughed

out loud

then

put him down

next to Nietzsche

who was also

all too

human.

shoes

when you’re young

a pair of

female

high-heeled shoes

just sitting

alone

in the closet

can fire your

bones;

when you’re old

it’s just

a pair of shoes

without

anybody

in them

and

just as

well.

coffee

I was having a coffee at the

counter

when a man

3 or 4 stools down

asked me,

“listen, weren’t you the

guy who was

hanging from his

heels

from that 4th floor

hotel room

the other

night?”

“yes,” I answered, “that

was me.”

“what made you do

that?” he asked.

“well, it’s pretty

involved.”

he looked away

then.

the waitress

who had been

standing there

asked me,

“he was joking,

wasn’t

he?”

“no,” I

said.

I paid, got up, walked

to the door, opened

it.

I heard the man

say, “that guy’s

nuts.”

out on the street I

walked north

feeling

curiously

honored.

together

HEY, I hollered across the

room to her,

DRINK SOME WINE OUT OF

YOUR SHOE!

WHY? she

screamed.

BECAUSE THIS USELESSNESS

NEEDS SOME

GAMBLE!

I yelled

back.

HEY, the guy in the next

apartment beat on the

wall, I'VE GOT TO GET UP

IN THE MORNING AND GO

TO WORK SO FOR CHRIST'S

SAKE, SHUT

UP!

he damn near broke the wall
down and had a most
powerful
voice.

I walked over to
her, said, listen, let's
be quiet, he's got some
rights.

FUCK YOU, YOU ASSHOLE!
she screamed
at me.

the guy began pounding
on the wall
again.

she was right and he was
right.

I walked the bottle over
to the window and
looked out into the
night.

then I had a good roaring

drink

and I thought, we are all

doomed

together, that's all there is

to

it. (that's all there was

to that particular drink, just

like all the

others.)

then I walked

back to her and

she was asleep in

her

chair.

I carried her to

the bed

turned out the

lights

then sat in the

chair by the

window

sucking at the

bottle, thinking,

well, I've gotten

this far

and that's

plenty.

and now

she's sleeping

and

maybe

he can

too.

the finest of the breed

there's nothing to

discuss

there's nothing to

remember

there's nothing to

forget

it's sad

and

it's not

sad

seems the

most sensible

thing

a person can

do

is

sit

with drink in

hand

as the walls

wave

their goodbye

smiles

one comes through

it

all

with a certain

amount of

efficiency and

bravery

then

leaves

some accept

the possibility of

God

to help them

get

through

others

take it

straight on

and to these

I drink

tonight.

close to greatness

at one stage in my life

I met a man who claimed to have

visited Pound at St. Elizabeths.

then I met a woman who not only

claimed to have visited

E.P.

but also to have made love

to him—she even showed

me

certain sections in the

Cantos

where Ezra was supposed to have

mentioned

her.

so there was this man and

this woman

and the woman told me

that Pound had never

mentioned a visit from this

man

and the man claimed that the

lady had had nothing to do

with the

master

that she was a

charlatan.

and since I wasn't a

Poundian scholar

I didn't know who to

believe

but

one thing I do

know: when a man is

living

many claim relationships

that are hardly

so

and after he dies, well,

then it's everybody's

party.

my guess is that Pound

knew neither the lady or the

gentleman

or if he knew

one

or if he knew

both

it was a shameful waste of

madhouse

time.

the stride

Norman and I, both 19, striding the streets of

night…feeling big, young young, big and

young

Norman said, “Jesus Christ, I bet nobody

walks with giant strides like we do!”

1939

after having listened to

Stravinsky

not long

after,

the war got

Norman.

I sit here now

46 years later

on the second floor of a hot

one a.m. morning

drunk

still big

not

so young.

Norman, you would

never guess

what

has happened to

me

what

has happened to

all of

us.

I remember your

saying: “make it or

break it.”

neither happened and

it

won’t.

final story

god, there he is drunk again

telling the same old stories

over and over again

as they push him for

more—some with nothing

else to do, others

secretly snickering

at this

great writer

babbling

drooling

in his little white

rat

whiskers

talking about

war

talking about the

wars

talking about the brave

fish

the bullfights

even about his wives.

the people

come into the

bar

night after night

for the same old

show

which he will one day

end

alone

blowing his brains to

the walls.

the price of creation

is never

too high.

the price of living

with other people

always

is.

friends within the darkness

I can remember starving in a
small room in a strange city
shades pulled down, listening to
classical music
I was young I was so young it hurt like a knife
inside
because there was no alternative except to hide as long
as possible—
not in self-pity but with dismay at my limited chance:
trying to connect.

the old composers—Mozart, Bach, Beethoven,
Brahms were the only ones who spoke to me and
they were dead.

finally, starved and beaten, I had to go into
the streets to be interviewed for low-paying and
monotonous
jobs
by strange men behind desks

men without eyes men without faces

who would take my hours

break them

piss on them.

now I work for the editors the readers the

critics

but still hang around and drink with

Mozart, Bach, Brahms and the

Bee

some buddies

some men

sometimes all we need to be able to continue alone

are the dead

rattling the walls

that close us in.

death sat on my knee and cracked with laughter

I was writing three short stories a week

and sending them to the *Atlantic Monthly*

they would all come back.

my money went for stamps and envelopes

and paper and wine

and I got so thin I used to

suck my cheeks

together

and they'd meet over the top of my

tongue (that's when I thought about

Hamsun's *Hunger*—where he ate his own

flesh; I once took a bite of my wrist

but it was very salty).

anyhow, one night in Miami Beach (I

have no idea what I was doing in that

city) I had not eaten in 60 hours

and I took the last of my starving

pennies

went down to the corner grocery and

bought a loaf of bread.

I planned to chew each slice slowly—

as if each were a slice of turkey

or a luscious

steak

and I got back to my room and

opened the wrapper and the

slices of bread were green

and mouldy.

my party was not to be.

I just dumped the bread upon the

floor

and I sat on that bed wondering about

the green mould, the

decay.

my rent money was used up and

I listened to all the sounds

of all the people in that

roominghouse

and down on the floor were

the dozens of stories with the

dozens of *Atlantic Monthly*

rejection slips.

it was early evening and I

turned out the light and

went to bed and

it wasn't long before I

heard the mice coming out,

I heard them creeping over my

immortal stories and

eating the

green mouldy bread.

and in the morning

when I awakened

I saw that

all that was left of the

bread

was the green

mould.

they had eaten right to the

edge of the mould

leaving chunks of

it

among the stories and

rejection slips

as I heard the sound of

my landlady's vacuum

cleaner

bumping down the

hall

slowly approaching my

door.

oh yes

I’ve been so

down in the mouth

lately

that sometimes when I

bend over to

lace my shoes

there are

three

tongues.

O tempora! O mores!

I get these girly magazines in the mail because
I'm writing short stories for them again
and here in these pages are these ladies
exposing their jewel boxes—
it looks more like a gynecologist's
journal—
everything boldly and clinically
exposed
beneath bland and bored physiognomies.
it's a turn-off of gigantic
proportions:
the secret is in the
imagination—
take that away and you have dead
meat.

a century back
a man could be driven mad
by a well-turned
ankle, and

why not?

one could imagine

that the rest

would be

magical

indeed!

now they shove it at us like a

McDonald's hamburger

on a platter.

there is hardly anything as beautiful as

a woman in a long dress

not even the sunrise

not even the geese flying south

in the long V formation

in the bright freshness

of early morning.

the passing of a great one

he was the only living writer I ever met who I truly
admired and he was dying when I met
him.
(we in this game are shy on praise even toward
those who do it very well, but I never had this
problem with J.F.)
I visited him several times at the
hospital (there was never anybody else
about) and upon entering his room
I was never sure if he was asleep
or?

“John?”

he was stretched there on that bed, blind
and amputated:
advanced
diabetes.

“John it’s
Hank…”

he would answer and then we would talk for
a short bit (mostly he would talk and I would
listen; after all, he was our mentor, our
god):

Ask the Dust
Wait Until Spring, Bandini
Dago Red

all the others.

to end up in Hollywood writing
movie scripts
that's what killed
him.

"the worst thing," he told me,
"is bitterness, people end up so
bitter."

he wasn't bitter, although he had
every right to
be…

at the funeral I
met several of his script-writing

buddies.

“let’s write something about
John,” one of them
suggested.

“I don’t think I can,” I
told them.

and, of course, they never
did.

the wine of forever

re-reading some of Fante's

The Wine of Youth

in bed

this mid-afternoon

my big cat

BEAKER

asleep beside

me.

the writing of some

men

is like a vast bridge

that carries you

over

the many things

that claw and tear.

Fante's pure and magic

emotions

hang on the simple

clean

line.

that this man died

one of the slowest and

most horrible deaths

that I ever witnessed or

heard

about…

the gods play no

favorites.

I put the book down

beside me.

book on one side,

cat on the

other…

John, meeting you,

even the way it

was was the event of my

life. I can't say

I would have died for

you, I couldn't have handled

it that well.

but it was good to see you

again

this

afternoon.

true

one of Lorca's best lines

is,

"agony, always

agony…"

think of this when you

kill a

cockroach or

pick up a razor to

shave

or awaken in the morning

to

face the

sun.

Glenn Miller

long ago

across from the campus

in the malt shop

the juke box going

the young girls perfectly in tune

dancing with the football players

and the college bright boys

Glenn Miller was the big thing then

and everybody stepped

almost everybody

I sat with a couple of disciples

we were supposed to be outlaws

the explorers of Truth

but I liked the music

and the laziness of waiting

as the world rushed toward war

as Hitler speechified

the girls whirled

graceful

showing leg

that last bright sunshine

we warmed ourselves in it

shutting away everything else

while the universe opened its mouth

in an attempt to

swallow us all.

Emily Bukowski

my grandmother always attended the sunrise

Easter service

and the Rose Bowl

parade.

she also liked to go to the

beach, sit on those benches

facing the sea.

she thought movies were

sinful.

she ate enormous platefuls of

food.

she prayed for me

constantly.

“poor boy: the devil is inside

of you.”

she said the devil was

inside her husband

too.

though not divorced

they lived

separately

and had not seen each

other

for 15 years.

she said that hospitals were

nonsense

she never used them

or

the doctors.

at 87

she died one evening

while feeding her

canary.

she liked to

drop the seed

into the cage

while making these

little

bird sounds.

she wasn’t very

interesting

but few people

are.

some suggestions

in addition to the envy and the rancor of some of
my peers
there is the other thing, it comes by telephone and
letter: “you are the world’s greatest living
writer.”

this doesn’t please me either because somehow
I believe that to be the world’s greatest living
writer
there must be something
terribly wrong with you.

I don’t even want to be the world’s greatest
dead writer.

just being dead would be fair
enough.

also, the word “writer” is a very tiresome
word.

just think how much more pleasing it would be
to hear:

you are the world's greatest pool

player

or

you are the world's greatest

fucker

or

you are the world's greatest

horseplayer.

now

that

would really make

a man feel

good.

invasion

I didn't know that

there was anything

in the closet

although some nights

my sleep would be

interrupted by strange

rumblings

but

I always thought

these to be

minor

quakes.

the closet was

the one

down the hall

and

was seldom

used.

the curious thing

for me

was that

the cats

(I had 4 of

them)

appeared to be

leaving

large

droppings

about

(and

they were

house-broken).

then

the cats

vanished

one by

one

but the fresh

droppings

kept

appearing.

it was one night

while I was

reading the

stock market

quotations

that I

looked up

and

there stood

the

lion

in the bedroom

doorway.

I was

in bed

propped up

with a

couple of

pillows

and drinking a

hot

chocolate.

now

nobody

can believe

a lion

in a

bedroom—

at least

not

in a city

of any

size.

so

I just kept

looking at the

lion

and not

quite

believing.

then

it turned and

walked down the

stairway.

I

followed it—

a good

18 feet

behind—

clutching my

baseball bat

in one

hand

and my

4-inch knife

in the

other.

I watched the

lion

go down the

stairway

then walk

across the front

room

it paused

before the large

plate glass

sliding

doors

which faced the

yard and the

street.

they were

closed.

the lion

emitted an

impatient

growl

and

leaped through the

glass

crashing through

into the

night.

I sat

on the couch

in the

dark

still unable

to believe

what

I had

seen.

then

I heard

a scream

of such utter

agony and

terror

that

for a

moment

I could

neither

see

breathe nor

comprehend.

I rose,

turned to

barricade myself

in the

bedroom

only to see

3 small

lion cubs

trundling

down

the stairway—

cute

devilish

felines

as the

mother

returned

through the

night and the

shattered glass

door

half dragging

half carrying

a bloodied

man

across the

rug

leaving a

red

trail

the cubs

rushed

forward

and the

moon

came through

to light

the

whirling

feast.

hard times

as I got out of my car down at the docks

two men started walking toward

me.

one looked old and mean and the other was

big and smiling.

they were both wearing

caps.

they kept walking toward me.

I got ready.

“something bothering you guys?”

“no,” said the old

guy.

they both stopped.

“don’t you remember us?”

“I’m not sure…”

“we painted your house.”

“oh, yeah…come on, I’ll buy you a

beer…”

we walked toward a cafe.

“you were one of the nicest guys we ever

worked for…”

“yeah?”

“yeah, you kept bringing us beer…”

we sat at one of those rough tables

overlooking the harbor. we

sucked at our

beers.

“you still live with that young

woman?” asked the old

guy.

“yeah. how you guys doing?”

“there’s no work now…”

I took out a ten and handed it to the old

one.

“listen, I forgot to tip you guys…”

“thanks.”

we sat with our beer.

the canneries had shut down.

Todd Shipyard had failed

and was

phasing them

out.

San Pedro was back in the

30's.

I finished my beer.

"well, you guys, I gotta go."

"where ya gonna go?"

"gonna buy some fish…"

I walked off toward the fish market,

turned halfway there

gave them

thumb-up

right hand.

they both took their caps off and

waved them.

I laughed, turned, walked

off.

sometimes it’s hard to know

what to

do.

longshot

of course, I had lost much blood

maybe it was a different kind of

dying

but I still had enough left to wonder

about

the absence of fear.

it was going to be easy: they had

put me in a special ward they had

in that place

for the poor who were

dying.

—the doors were a little thicker

—the windows a little smaller

and there was much

wheeling in and out of

bodies

plus

the presence of the priest

giving last

rites.

you saw the priest all the time
but you seldom saw a
doctor.

it was always nice to see a
nurse—
they rather took the place of
angels
for those who
believed in that sort of
thing.

the priest kept bugging me.

“no offense, Father, but I’d
rather die without
it,” I whispered.

“but on your entrance application you
stated ‘Catholic.’”

“that was just to be
social…”

“my son, once a Catholic, always a

Catholic!”

“Father,” I whispered, “that’s not

true…”

the nicest thing about the place were

the Mexican girls who came in to

change the sheets, they giggled, they

joked with the dying and

they were

beautiful.

and the worst thing was

the Salvation Army Band who

came around at

5:30 a.m.

Easter Morning

and gave us the old

religious feeling—horns and drums

and all, much

brass and

pounding, tremendous volume

there were 40 or so

in that room

and that band

stiffened a good

10 or 15 of us by

6 a.m.

and they rolled them right out

to the morgue elevator

over to the west, a very

busy elevator.

I stayed in Death's waiting room for

3 days.

I watched them roll out close to

fifty.

they finally got tired of waiting

for me

and rolled me

out of there.

a nice black homosexual fellow

pushed me

along.

"you want to know the odds of

coming out of that ward?"

he asked.

“yeah.”

“50 to one.”

“hell,

got any

smokes?”

“no, but I can get you

some.”

we rolled along

as the sun managed to come through the

wire-webbed windows

and I began to think of

that first drink when

I got

out.

concrete

he had set up the

reading

he was one of the foremost practitioners

of concrete poetry

and after I read I went

up there to where he

lived

his place was high in the

mountains and

we drank and looked out the large

window at very large

birds

flying about

gliding mostly

he said they were eagles

(he might have been putting me

on)

and his wife played the

piano

a bit of

Brahms

he didn’t talk

much

he was a concrete

man

his wife was very

beautiful

and the way the eagles

glided

that was very beautiful

also

then it was twilight

then it was night

and you couldn’t see the eagles

anymore

it had been an afternoon

reading

we drank until one

a.m.

then I got into my car

and drove the winding

narrow road

d

o

w

n

I was too drunk to fear the

danger

when I got to my place I

drank two bottles of

beer and went to

bed.

then the phone

rang

it was my

girlfriend

she had been calling all

night

she was angry

she accused me of fornicating with

another

I told her about the beautiful

eagles

how they glided

and that I had been with a concrete

man

bullshit

she said

and hung

up

I stretched out there

looked at the ceiling and

wondered what the eagles

ate

then the phone rang

again

and she asked

did the concrete man have a

concrete wife and did you stick you

dick in her?

no

I answered

I fucked an

eagle

she hung up

again

concrete poetry

I thought

what the hell is

it?

then I went to sleep and I

slept and I

slept.

Gay Paree

the cafes in Paris are just like you imagine

they are:

very well-dressed people, snobs, and

the snob-waiter comes up and takes your

order

as if you were a

leper.

but after you get your wine

you feel better

you begin to feel like a snob

yourself

and you give the guy at the next table

a sidelong glance

he catches you and

you twitch your nose

a bit as if you had just smelled

dogshit

then you

look away.

and the food

when it arrives

is always too mild.

the French are delicate with their

spices.

and

as you eat and drink

you realize that everybody is

terrorized:

too bad

too bad

such a lovely city

full of

cowards.

then

more wine brings more

realization:

Paris is the world and the world

is

Paris.

drink to it

and

because of

it.

I thought the stuff tasted worse than usual

I used to drink with Jane

every night

until two or

three

a.m.

and I had to

report for

work

at 5:30

a.m.

one morning

I was sitting

casing mail

next to this

healthy

religious

fellow

and he said,
“hey, I *smell*
something, don’t
you?”

I answered in the
negative.

“actually,” he said,
“it smells something
like
gasoline.”

“well,” I told
him, “don’t light a
match or
I might
explode.”

the blade

there was no parking near the post office where

I worked at night

so I found this splendid spot

(nobody seemed to care to park there)

on a dirt road behind a

slaughterhouse

and as I sat in my car

just before work

smoking a last cigarette

I was treated to the same

scene

as each evening tailed off into

night—

the pigs were herded out of the

yard pens

and onto runways

by a man making pig sounds and

flapping a large canvas

and the pigs ran wildly

up the runway

toward the waiting

blade,

and many evenings

after watching that

after finishing my

smoke

I just started the car

backed out of there and

drove away from my

job.

my absenteeism reached such astonishing

proportions

that I had to finally

park

at some expense

behind a Chinese bar

where all I could see were tiny shuttered

windows

with neon signs advertising some

oriental

libation.

it seemed less real, and that was

what was

needed.

the boil

I was making good with the girls on the assembly line at
Nabisco, I had recently beaten up the company
bully
on my lunch hour,
things were going well, I was from out of
town, the stranger who seldom spoke to
anybody, I was the mystery man, I was the
cool number,
almost all those fillies had an interest
in me
and the guys didn't know
what the hell.

then one morning I awakened in my
room
with a huge boil on the side of
my head (right cheek)
and
it was damn near the size of a
golf ball.

I should have phoned in sick

but

I didn't have the sense and

went on in

anyhow.

it made a difference: the women's eyes

fell away from mine, and the guys

no longer acted fearful

and I felt defeated by

fate.

the boil remained

for

2 days

3 days

4 days.

on the 5th day the foreman handed me

my papers: "we're cutting back, you're

finished."

this was one hour before

lunch.

I walked to my locker, opened it,

took off my apron and cap

threw them in there

along with the

key

and walked

out

a truly horrible walk

to the street

where I turned around

and looked back at the building

feeling as if they had

discovered

something

hideously indecent

about me.

not listed

my horse was the grey

a 4 to one shot

with early lick

and he had a length and

a half

3/4's of the way

down the stretch

when his left front leg

snapped

and he tumbled

tossing the jock

over his neck and

head.

luckily

the field avoided both

the horse and the

jock—who

got up and limped away

from the kicking

animal.

accident potential:

that's something

that's not listed in

the Racing Form.

in the clubhouse

I saw Harry

standing in a far-

off corner.

he was an x-jock's

agent

now working as a

trainer

but not having

too many mounts

to train.

he was behind his

dark shades

looking

awful.

"you have the grey?"

I asked.

“yeah,” he said,

“heavy…”

“you need a transfusion,

it’s not much but…”

I slipped

3 folded 20’s

into his coat

pocket.

“thanks,” he

said.

“put it on a good one.”

Harry had done me some

nice things

and anyhow

he was one of the

best

working for an edge

in one of the bloodiest

rackets

around: we are trying to

beat the percentages

and each day

some must fall

so that

others can go

on. (the track is just

like anyplace else

only there

it usually happens

more

quickly.)

I walked over and got

a coffee.

I liked the next

race

a six furlong affair for

non-winners of

two.

one good hit

would put the gods in

place

and cure

everything

in a flash of

glory…

I’m not a misogynist

more and more

I get letters from

young ladies:

“I’m a well-built 19

am between jobs and

your writing turns me

on

I’m a good housekeeper

and secretary and

would *never* get in

your way

and

would send a

photo but that’s

so tacky…”

“I’m 21

tall and attractive

have read your books

I work for a

lawyer and

if you're ever in

town

please call me."

"I met you

after your reading

at the Troubadour

we had a night

together

do you remember?

I married

that man

you told me had a

mean voice

when you phoned and

he answered

we're divorced now

I have a little

girl

age 2

I am no longer in

the music

business but

miss it

would like to

see you

again…”

“I’ve read

all your books

I’m 23

not much

breast

but have *great*

legs

and

just a few

words

from you

would mean

so much

to me…”

girls

please give your

bodies and your

lives

to

the young men

who

deserve them

besides

there is

no way

I would welcome

the

intolerable

dull

senseless hell

you would bring

me

and

I wish you

luck

in bed

and

out

but not

in

mine

thank

you.

the lady in the castle

she lived in this house

that looked like a

castle

and when you got inside

the ceilings were so very

high

and I was poor

and it all rather

fascinated

me.

she

was no longer

young

but she had

masses

of hair

that damn near

went down to her

ankles

and
I thought about
how strange
it would be
doing it
with all that
hair.

I drove up there
several times
in my old
car
and she had fine

liquors to
drink
and we sat
but I could
never quite get
near her
and though I didn’t
push at
it

something about

not

connecting

did offend my

ego

for ugly as I was

I had always been

lucky with the

ladies.

it confused me

and I suppose

I needed

that.

she liked to

talk about

the arts and

about

film making

and listening

to all that

only made me

drink

more.

I

finally

just

gave her

up

and a good year

or so

went by

when

one night

the phone

rang: it was the

lady.

“I want to come see

you,” she said.

“I’m writing now, I’m

hot…I can’t see

anybody…”

“I just want to come

by, I won’t bother you,

I'll just sit on the couch,

I'll sleep on the couch, I

won't bother you…"

"NO! JESUS CHRIST, I

CAN'T SEE ANYBODY!"

I hung up.

the lady who was *actually*

on the couch

said, "oh, you're all

SOFT now!"

"yeah."

"come here…"

she took my penis

in her hand

flicked out her

tongue

then

stopped.

"what are you writing?"

"nothing…I've got writer's

block…”

“sure you have…your pipes are

clogged…you need to get

cleaned out…”

then she had me in her

mouth

and then the phone rang

again…

in a fury

I ran over to the

phone

picked it

up.

it was the lady in the

castle:

“listen, I won’t bother you,

you won’t even know I’m

there…”

“YOU WHORE, I’M GETTING A

BLOW JOB!”

I hung up and

turned back.

the other lady was walking

toward the

door.

“what’sa matter?” I

asked.

“I can’t STAND that

term!”

“what term?”

“BLOW JOB!” she

screamed.

she slammed the door and

was gone…

I walked to where the

typewriter sat

put a new piece of paper

in there.

it was one

a.m.

I sat there and

drank scotch and

beer chasers

smoked cheap

cigars.

3:15 a.m.

I was still sitting

there

re-lighting old

cigar stubs and

drinking ale.

the new

piece of paper was still

unused.

I switched out the

lights

worked my way toward

the bedroom

got myself on the

bed

clothes still

on

I could hear the toilet

running

but couldn’t get up

to tap the handle

to end that

sound

my god damned pipes were

clogged.

relentless as the tarantula

they’re not going to let you

sit at a front table

at some cafe in Europe

in the mid-afternoon sun.

if you do, somebody’s going to

drive by and

spray your guts with a

submachine gun.

they’re not going to let you

feel good

for very long

anywhere.

the forces aren’t going to

let you sit around

fucking-off and

relaxing.

you’ve got to do it

their way.

the unhappy, the bitter and

the vengeful

need their

fix—which is

you or somebody

anybody

in agony, or

better yet

dead, dropped into some

hole.

as long as there are

human beings about

there is never going to be

any peace

for any individual

upon this earth (or

anywhere else

they might

escape to).

all you can do

is maybe grab

ten lucky minutes

here

or maybe an hour

there.

something

is working toward you

right now, and

I mean you

and nobody but

you.

their night

never could read *Tender Is the*

Night

but they've made a

tv adaptation of the

book

and it's been running

for several

nights

and I have spent

ten minutes

here and there

watching the troubles of

the rich

while they are leaning

against their beach chairs

in Nice

or walking about their

large rooms

drink in hand while

making

philosophical

statements

or

fucking up

at the

dinner party

or the

dinner dance

they really have no

idea

of what to do with

themselves:

swim?

tennis?

drive up the

coast?

down the

coast?

find

new beds?

lose old

ones?

or

fuck with the

arts and the

artists?

having nothing to struggle

against

they have nothing to struggle

for.

the rich are different

all right

so is the ring-

tailed

maki and the

sand

flea.

huh?

in

Germany France Italy

I can walk down the streets and be

followed by

young men laughing

young ladies

giggling and

old

ladies turning their noses

up…

while

in America

I am just another

tired

old man

doing whatever

tired old men

do.

oh, this has its
compensations:
I can take my pants
to the cleaners or
stand in a
supermarket line
without any
hubbub at
all:
the gods have allowed me
a gentle
anonymity.

yet
at times
I do consider my
overseas fame
and
the only thing
I can come up with is
that
I must have some

great motherfucking

translators.

I must

owe them

the hair on my

balls

or

possibly

my balls

themselves.

it’s funny, isn’t it? #1

we were standing around

at this birthday party

at this fancy

restaurant

and

many

special people were

about

preening their

fame.

I wanted to run

out

when a man

standing near by

said something

exactly appropriate

to the

occasion.

“hey,” I said to

my wife, “this

guy’s got

something. when we are

seated

let’s try to

sit next to

him.”

we did and as

the drinks were

poured

the man began

talking

he began on a

long story

which was

building toward a

punch

line.

my problem was that

I could guess

what the

punch line

was

going to

be.

and

he talked

on and

on

then

dropped the

line.

“shit,” I

told him, “that

was

awful, you’ve

really

disappointed

me…”

he

only began

on another

story.

I walked over to

another table

and stood behind

the now

great

movie star.

“listen,

when I first met

you

you were just a nice

German boy.

now

you’ve turned into

a

conceited

prick. you’ve

really

disappointed

me.”

the great movie
star (who was a
man
mighty of
muscle) growled
and
shook his
shoulders.

then I walked over to
the table
where the birthday lady
sat
surrounded by
all these
media
folk.

“looking at you
people,” I said, “makes
me feel like
vomiting
all over

your

inept

plausibilities!”

“oh,” said the lady

to her

guests, “he

always talks

that

way!”

and she gave a

laugh, poor

dear.

so

I said, “Happy

birthday,

but

I warned you

never to

invite me to these

things.”

then

I walked back to

my table

motioned the waiter

for

another

drink.

the man

was telling

another

story

but

it was not

nearly

as good

as

this

one.

it’s funny, isn’t it? #2

when we were kids

laying around the lawn

on our

bellies

we often talked

about

how

we’d like to

die

and

we all

agreed on the

same

thing:

we’d all

like to die

fucking

(although

none of us

had

done any

fucking)

and now

that

we are hardly

kids

any longer

we think more

about

how

not to

die

and

although

we’re

ready

most of

us

would

prefer to

do it

alone

under the

sheets

now

that

most of

us

have fucked

our lives

away.

the beautiful lady editor

she was a beautiful woman, I used to see photographs of

her in the literary magazines of that

day.

I was young but always alone—I felt that I needed the

time to get something done and the only way I could buy time

was with

poverty.

I worked not so much with craft but more with getting down

what was edging me toward madness—and I had

flashes of luck, but it was hardly a pleasurable

existence.

I think I showed a fine endurance but slowly then

health and courage began to leak away.

and the night arrived when everything fell apart—and

fear, doubt, humiliation entered…

and I wrote a number of letters using my last stamps

telling a few select people that I had made a

mistake, that I was starving and trapped in a small

freezing shack of darkness in a strange city in

a strange

state.

I mailed the letters and then I waited long wild days and

nights, hoping, yearning at last for a decent

response.

only two letters ever arrived—on the same day—

and I opened the pages and shook the pages looking for

money but there was

none.

one letter was from my father, a six-pager telling me that

I deserved what was happening, that I should have become

an engineer like he told me, and that nobody would ever read

the kind of stuff I wrote, and on and on, like

that.

the other letter was from the beautiful lady editor, neatly typed on

expensive stationery, and she said that she was no longer

publishing her literary magazine, that she had found God

and was

living in a castle on a hill in Italy and helping the poor, and

she signed her famous name, with a “God Bless you,” and that was

that.

ah, you have no idea, in that dark freezing shack, how much I wanted to

be poor in Italy instead of Atlanta, to be a poor peasant,

yes, or even a dog on her bedspread, or even a flea on that

dog on that

bedspread: how much I wanted the tiniest

warmth.

the lady had published me along with Henry Miller, Sartre, Celine,

others.

I should never have asked for money in a world where millions of

peasants were crawling the starving

streets

and even some years later when the lady editor

died

I still thought her

beautiful.

about the PEN conference

take a writer away from his typewriter

and all you have left

is

the sickness

which started him

typing

in the

beginning.

everybody talks too much

when

the cop pulled me

over

I

handed him my

license.

he

went back

to radio in

the make

and model

of my car

and

get clearance on

my plates.

he wrote

the ticket

walked

up

handed it

to me

to

sign.

I did

he gave

me

back the

license.

“how come

you

don’t

say

anything?”

he asked.

I shrugged

my

shoulders.

“well, sir,”

he

said, “have

a

good day

and

drive

carefully.”

I

noticed

some sweat

on his

brow

and the

hand

that held

the

ticket

seemed to

be

trembling

or

perhaps

I

was only

imagining it?

anyhow

I

watched him

move

toward

his

bike

then I

pulled

away…

when confronted

with

dutiful

policemen

or

women

in rancor

I

have nothing

to

say

to them

for

if I

truly

began

it would

end

in

somebody’s

death:

theirs or

mine

so

I

let them

have

their

little

victories

which

they need

far

more

than

I

do.

me and my buddy

I can still see us

together

back then

sitting by the river

while shit-

faced on the

grape

and playing with the

poem

knowing it to be

utterly useless

but something to

do

while

waiting

the Emperors

with their frightened

clay faces

watch us as we

drink

Li Po crumbles his

poems

sets them on

fire

floats them down the

river.

“what have you

done?” I

ask him.

Li passes the

bottle: “they are

going to end

no matter what

happens…”

I drink to his

knowledge

pass the bottle

back

sit tightly upon my

poems

which I have

jammed halfway up my

crotch

I help him burn

some more of his

poesy

they float well

down

the river

lighting up the

night

as good words

should.

song

Julio came by with his guitar and sang his
latest song.
Julio was famous, he wrote songs and also
published books of little drawings and
poems.
they were very
good.

Julio sang a song about his latest love
affair.
he sang that
it began so well
then it went to
hell.

those were not the words exactly
but that was the meaning of the
words.

Julio finished
singing.

then he said, “I still care for
her, I can’t get her off my
mind.”

“what will I do?” Julio
asked.

“drink,” Henry said,
pouring.

Julio just looked at his
glass:
“I wonder what she’s doing
now?”

“probably engaging in oral
copulation,” Henry
suggested.

Julio put his guitar back in
the case and
walked to the
door.

Henry walked Julio to his car which
was parked in the

drive.

it was a nice moonlit

night.

as Julio started his car and

backed out the drive

Henry waved him a

farewell.

then he went inside

sat

down.

he finished Julio's untouched

drink

then he

phoned

her.

"he was just by," Henry told

her, "he's feeling very

bad…"

"you'll have to excuse me,"

she said, "but I'm busy right

now.”

she hung

up.

and Henry poured one of his

own

as outside the crickets sang

their own

song.

practice

in that depression neighborhood I had two buddies
Eugene and Frank
and I had wild fist fights with each of
them
once or twice a week.
the fights lasted 3 or 4 hours and we came out
with
smashed noses, fattened lips, black eyes, sprained
wrists, bruised knuckles, purple
welts.

our parents said nothing, let us fight on and
on
watching disinterestedly and
finally going back to their newspapers
or their radios or their thwarted sex lives,
they only became angry if we tore or ruined our
clothing, and for that and only for that.

but Eugene and Frank and I

we had some good work-outs

we rumbled through the evenings, crashing through

hedges, fighting along the asphalt, over the

curbings and into strange front and backyards of

unknown homes, the dogs barking, the people screaming at

us.

we were

maniacal, we never quit until the call for supper

which none of us could afford to

miss.

anyhow, Eugene became a Commander in the

Navy and Frank became a Supreme Court Justice, State of

California and I fiddled with the

poem.

love poem to a stripper

50 years ago I watched the girls

shake it and strip

at The Burbank and The Follies

and it was very sad

and very dramatic

as the light turned from green to

purple to pink

and the music was loud and

vibrant,

now I sit here tonight

smoking and

listening to classical

music

but I still remember some of

their names: Darlene, Candy, Jeanette

and Rosalie.

Rosalie was the

best, she knew how,

and we twisted in our seats and

made sounds

as Rosalie brought magic

to the lonely

so long ago.

now Rosalie

either so very old or

so quiet under the

earth,

this is the pimple-faced

kid

who lied about his

age

just to watch

you.

you were good, Rosalie

in 1935,

good enough to remember

now

when the light is

yellow

and the nights are

slow.

my buddy

for a 21-year-old boy in New Orleans I wasn't worth
much: I had a dark small room that smelled of
piss and death
yet I just wanted to stay in there, and there were
two lively girls down at the end of the hall who
kept knocking on my door and yelling, "Get up!
There are good things out here!"

"Go away," I told them, but that only goaded
them on, they left notes under my door and
scotch-taped flowers to the
doorknob.

I was on cheap wine and green beer and
dementia…

I got to know the old guy in the next
room, somehow I felt old like
him; his feet and ankles were swollen and he couldn't
lace his shoes.

each day about one p.m. we went for a walk

together and it was a very slow
walk: each step was painful for
him.

as we came to the curbing I helped him
up and down
gripping him by an elbow
and the back of his
belt, we made it.

I liked him: he never questioned me about
what I was or wasn't
doing.

he should have been my father, and I liked
best what he said over and
over: "Nothing is worth
it."

he was a
sage.

those young girls should have
left him the
notes and the
flowers.

Jon Edgar Webb

I had a lyric poem period down in New Orleans, pounding

out these fat rolling lines and

drinking gallons of beer.

it felt good like screaming in a madhouse, the madhouse of

my world

as the mice scattered among the

empties.

at times I went into the bars

but I couldn't work it out with those people who sat on the

stools:

men evaded me and the women were terrified of

me.

bartenders asked that I

leave.

I did, struggling back with wondrous six-packs

to the room and the mice and those fat rolling

lines.

that lyric poem period was a raving bitch of a

time

and there was an editor right around the

corner who

fed each page into a waiting press, rejecting

nothing

even though I was unknown

he printed me upon ravenous paper

manufactured to last

2,000 years.

this editor who was also the publisher and

the printer

kept a straight face as I handed him the ten to

twenty pages

each morning:

“is that all?”

that crazy son of a bitch, he was a lyric

poem

himself.

thank you

some want me to go on writing about whores

and puking.

others say that type of thing disgusts

them.

well, I don't miss the

whores

although now and then one or another makes an

attempt to locate

me.

I don't know if they miss all the booze and

the bit of money I gave them

or if they are enthralled at the way

I've immortalized them in

literature.

anyhow, they must now make do with

whatever men

they are able to scrounge

up.

—those poor darlings had no

idea…

and neither did I

that those ugly roaring nights

would be fodder

such as even

Dostoevski

would not shy away

from.

the magic curse

I never liked skid-row and so I stayed away from the soup kitchens, the bloodbanks and all the so-called hand-outs.

I got so god damned thin that if
I turned sidewise it was hard to see my shadow under a hard noon sun.

it didn't matter to me so long as I stayed away from the crowd

and even down there it was a
successful and an unsuccessful
crowd.

I don't think I was insane
but many of the
insane think
that

but I think
now
if anything saved me

it was the avoidance of the

crowd

it was my

food

still

is.

get me in a room with more than

3 people

I tend to act

ill

odd.

I once

even asked my wife: look, I must be

sick…perhaps I ought to see a

shrink?

Christ, I said, he might cure me

and then what would I

do?

she just looked at me

and we forgot the

whole

thing.

party's over

after you've pulled off the tablecloth with

the full plates of food

and broken the windows

and rung the bells of

idiots

and have

spoken true and terrible

words

and have

chased the mob through the

doorway—

then comes the great and

peaceful moment: sitting alone

and

pouring that quiet drink.

the world is better without

them.

only the plants and the animals are

true comrades.

I drink to them and with

them.

they wait as I fill their

glasses.

no nonsense

Faulkner loved his whiskey

and along with the

writing

he didn't have

time

for much

else.

he didn't open

most of his

mail

just held it up

to the light

and if it didn't

contain a

check

he trashed

it.

escape

the best part was

pulling down the

shades

stuffing the doorbell

with rags

putting the phone

in the

refrigerator

and going to bed

for 3 or 4

days.

and the next best

part

was

nobody ever

missed

me.

wearing the collar

I live with a lady and four cats

and some days we all get

along.

some days I have trouble with

one of the

cats.

other days I have trouble with

two of the

cats.

other days,

three.

some days I have trouble with

all four of the

cats

and the

lady:

ten eyes looking at me

as if I was a dog.

a cat is a cat is a cat is a cat

she's whistling and clapping

for the cats

at 2 a.m.

as I sit in here

with my

Beethoven.

"they're just prowling," I

tell her…

Beethoven rattles his bones

majestically

and those damn cats

don't care

about

any of it

and

if they did

I wouldn't like them

as

well:

things begin to lose their

natural value

when they approach

human

endeavor.

nothing against

Beethoven:

he did fine

for what he

was

but I wouldn't want

him

on my rug

with one leg

over his head

while

he was

licking

his balls.

marching through Georgia

we are burning like a chicken wing left on the grill of an

outdoor barbecue

we are unwanted and burning we are burning and unwanted we are

an unwanted

burning

as we sizzle and fry

to the bone

the coals of Dante's *Inferno* spit and sputter beneath

us

and

above the sky is an open hand and

the words of wise men are useless

it's not a nice world, a nice world it's

not…

come on, try this nice burnt chicken-wing poem

it's hot it's tough not much

meat

but 'tis sadly sensible

and one or two bites ends it

thus

gone

it left like the ladies of old

as I opened the door

to the room

bed

pillows

walls

I lost it

I lost it somewhere

while walking down the street

or while lifting weights

or while watching a parade

I lost it

while watching a wrestling match

or while waiting at a red light

at noon on some smoggy day

I lost it while putting a coin

into a parking meter

I lost it

as the wild dogs slept.

I meet the famous poet

this poet had long been famous

and after some decades of

obscurity I

got lucky

and this poet appeared

interested

and asked me to his

beach apartment.

he was homosexual and I was

straight, and worse, a

lush.

I came by, looked

about and

declaimed (as if I didn't

know), "hey, where the

fuck are the

babes?"

he just smiled and stroked

his mustache.

he had little lettuces and

delicate cheeses and

other dainties

in his refrigerator.

“where you keep your fucking

beer, man?” I

asked.

it didn’t matter, I had

brought my own

bottles and I began upon

them.

he began to look

alarmed: “I’ve heard about

your brutality, please

desist from

that!”

I flopped down on his

couch, belched,

laughed: “ah, shit, baby, I’m

not gonna hurt ya! ha, ha,

ha!”

“you are a fine writer,” he

said, “but as a person you are

utterly

despicable!”

“that’s what I like about me

best, baby!” I

continued to pour them

down.

at once

he seemed to vanish behind

some sliding wooden

doors.

“hey, baby, come on

out! I ain’t gonna do no

bad! we can sit around and

talk that dumb literary

bullshit all night

long! I won’t

brutalize you,

shit, I

promise!”

“I don’t trust you,”

came the little

voice.

well, there was nothing to

do

but slug it down, I was

too drunk to drive

home.

when I awakened in the

morning he was standing over

me

smiling.

“uh,” I said,

“hi…”

“did you mean what you

said last night?” he

asked.

“uh, what wuz

ut?”

“I slid the doors back and
stood there and you saw
me and you said that
I looked like I was riding the
prow of some great sea

ship…you said that
I looked like a
Norseman! is
that true?”

“oh, yeah, yeah, you
did…”

he fixed me some hot tea
with toast
and I got that
down.

“well,” I said, “good to
have met
you…”

“I’m sure,” he
answered.

the door closed behind

me

and I found the elevator

down

and

after some wandering about the

beach front

I found my car, got

in, drove off

on what appeared to be

favorable terms

between the famous poet and

myself

but

it wasn’t

so:

he started writing un-

believably hateful stuff

about

me

and I

got my shots in at

him.

the whole matter

was just about

like

most other writers

meeting

and

anyhow

that part about

calling him a

Norseman

wasn't true at

all: I called him

a

Viking

and it also

isn't true

that without his

aid

I never would have

appeared in the

Penguin Collection of

Modern Poets

along with him

and who

was it?

yeah:

Lamantia.

seize the day

foul fellow he was always wiping his nose on his

sleeve and also farting at regular

intervals, he was

uncombed

uncouth

unwanted.

his every third word was a crass

entrail

and he grinned through broken yellow

teeth

his breath stinking above the

wind

he continually dug into his crotch

left-

handed

and he always had a

dirty joke

at the ready,

a dunce of the lowest

order

a most most

avoided

man

until

he won the state

lottery.

now

you should see

him: always a young laughing lady on

each arm

he eats at the finest

places

the waiters fighting to get him

at their

table

he belches and farts away the

night

spilling his wineglass

picking up his steak with his

fingers

while

his ladies call him

“original” and “the funniest

man I ever met.”

and what they do to him

in bed

is a damned

shame.

what we have to keep

remembering, though, is that

50% of the state lottery is given to the

Educational System and

that’s important

when you realize that

only one person in

nine

can properly spell

“emulously.”

the shrinking island

I'm working on it as

the dawn bends toward me…

I almost had it at 3:34 a.m. but it

slipped away from me

with the wizardry of a

silverfish…

now

as the half-light moves toward me

like motherfucking death

I give up the battle

rise

move toward the bathroom

bang

into a wall

give a pitiful mewking

laugh…

flick on the light and

begin to piss, yes, in

the proper place

and

after flushing

think: another night

gone.

well, we gave it a bit of

a roar

anyhow.

we wash our

claws…

flick off the

light

move toward the

bedroom where the

wife

awakens enough

to say: “don’t step

on the cat!”

which brings us back

to

matters

real

as we find the bed

slip in

face to ceiling: a

grounded

drunken

fat

old

man.

magic machine

I liked the old records that

scratched

as the needle slid across

grooves well

worn

you heard the voice

coming through

the speaker

as if there were a person

inside that

mahogany

box

but you only listened while

your parents were

not there.

and if you didn't wind

the victrola

it gradually slowed and

stopped.

it was best in late

afternoons

and the records spoke

of

love.

love, love, love.

some of the records had

beautiful purple

labels,

others were orange, green,

yellow, red, blue.

the victrola had belonged to

my grandfather

and he had listened to those

same

records.

and now I was a boy

and

I heard them.

and nothing I could think of

in my life then

seemed better than listening

to that

victrola

when my parents weren't

there.

those girls we followed home

in Jr. High the two prettiest girls were

Irene and Louise,

they were sisters;

Irene was a year older, a little taller

but it was difficult to choose between

them;

they were not only pretty but they were

astonishingly beautiful

so beautiful

that the boys stayed away from them;

they were terrified of Irene and

Louise

who weren't aloof at all,

even friendlier than most

but

who seemed to dress a bit

differently than the other

girls:

they always wore high heels,

silk stockings,

blouses,

skirts,

new outfits

each day;

and,

one afternoon

my buddy, Baldy, and I followed them

home from school;

you see, we were kind of

the bad guys on the grounds

so it was

more or less

expected,

and

it was something:

walking along ten or twelve feet behind them;

we didn't say anything

we just followed

watching

their voluptuous swaying,

the balancing of the

haunches.

we liked it so much that we

followed them home from school

every

day.

when they'd go into their house

we'd stand outside on the sidewalk

smoking cigarettes and talking.

"someday," I told Baldy,

"they are going to invite us inside their

house and they are going to

fuck us."

"you really think so?"

"sure."

now

50 years later

I can tell you

they never did

—never mind all the stories we

told the guys;

yes, it's the dream that

keeps you going

then and

now.

fractional note

the flowers are burning

the rocks are melting

the door is stuck inside my head

it's one hundred and two degrees in Hollywood

and the messenger stumbles

dropping the last message into a

hole in the earth

400 miles deep.

the movies are worse than ever

and the dead books of dead men read dead.

the white rats run the treadmill.

the bars stink in swampland darkness

as the lonely unfulfill the lonely.

there's no clarity.

there was never meant to be clarity.

the sun is diminishing, they say.

wait and see.

gravy barks like a dog.

if I had a grandmother

my grandmother could whip your

grandmother.

free fall.

free dirt.

shit costs money.

check the ads for sales…

now everybody is singing at once

terrible voices

coming from torn throats.

hours of practice.

it's almost entirely waste.

regret is *mostly* caused by not having

done anything.

the mind barks like a dog.

pass the gravy.

it is so arranged all the way to

oblivion.

next meter reading date:

JUN 20.

and I feel good.

a following

the phone rang at 1:30 a.m.

and it was a man from Denver:

“Chinaski, you got a following in

Denver…”

“yeah?”

“yeah, I got a magazine and I want some

poems from you…”

“FUCK YOU, CHINASKI!” I heard a voice

in the background…

“I see you have a friend,”

I said.

“yeah,” he answered, “now, I want

six poems…”

“CHINASKI SUCKS! CHINASKI’S A PRICK!”

I heard the other

voice.

“you fellows been drinking?”

I asked.

“so what?” he answered. “you drink.”

“that’s true…”

“CHINASKI’S AN ASSHOLE!”

then
the editor of the magazine gave me the
address and I copied it down on the back
of an envelope.

“send us some poems now…”

“I’ll see what I can do…”

“CHINASKI WRITES SHIT!”

“goodbye,” I said.

“goodbye,” said the
editor.

I hung up.

there are certainly any number of lonely
people without much to do with
their nights.

a tragic meeting

I was more visible and available then

and I had this great weakness:

I thought that going to bed with many women

meant that a man was clever and good and

superior

especially if he did it at the age of

55

to any number of bunnies

and I lifted weights

drank like mad

and did

that.

most of the women were nice

and most of them looked good

and only one or two were really dumb and

dull

but JoJo

I can't even categorize.

her letters were slight, repeated

the same things:

“I like your books, would like to meet

you…”

I wrote back and told her

it would be

all right.

then along came the instructions

where I was to meet

her: at this college

on this date

at this time

just after her

classes.

the college was up in the

hills and

the day and time

arrived

and with her drawings

of twisting streets

plus a road map

I set out.

it was somewhere between the Rose Bowl
and one of the largest graveyards in
Southern California
and I got there early and sat in my
car
nipping at the Cutty Sark
and looking at the
co-eds—there were so many of
them, one simply couldn't have
them *all*.

then the bell rang and I got out of my
car and walked to the front of the
building, there was a long row of
steps and the students walked out of the
building and down the steps
and I stood and
waited, and like with airport
arrivals
I had no idea
which one
it would be.

“Chinaski,” somebody said
and there she was: 18, 19,
neither ugly nor beautiful, of
average body and features,
seeming to be neither vicious,
intelligent, dumb or
insane.

we kissed lightly and then
I asked her if she
had a car
and she said
she had a car
and I said, “fine, I’ll drive you
to it, then you follow
me…”

JoJo was a good follower, she followed me all
the way to my beat-up court in east
Hollywood.

I poured her a drink and we talked very
drab talk and kissed a
bit.

the kisses were neither good nor bad
nor interesting or un-
interesting.

much time went by and she drank very
little
and we kissed some more and she said,
“I like your books, they really do things
to me.”
“Fuck my books!” I told her.
I was down to my shorts and I had her
skirt up to her ass

and I was working hard
but she just kissed and
talked.
she responded and she didn’t
respond.

then
I gave up and started drinking
heavily.
she mentioned a few of the other
writers

she liked

but she didn't like any of them

the way she liked

me.

"yeah," I poured a new one, "is that

so?"

"I've got to get going," JoJo said,

"I've got a class in the

morning."

"you can sleep here," I suggested, "and

get an early start, I scramble great

eggs."

"no, thank you, I've got to

go…"

and she left with

several copies of my books

she had never seen

before,

copies I had given her

much *earlier* in the

evening.

I had another drink and decided to

sleep it off

as an unexplainable

loss.

I switched off the lights

and threw myself upon the

bed without

washing-up or

brushing my

teeth.

I looked up into the dark

and thought, now, here is one

I will never be able to

write about:

she was neither good nor bad,

real or unreal, kind or

unkind, she was just a girl

from a college

somewhere between the Rose Bowl and

the dumping grounds.

then I began to itch, I scratched
myself, I seemed to feel things
on my face, on my belly, I inhaled,
exhaled, tried to sleep but
the itching got worse, then
I felt a bite, then several bites,
things appeared to be
crawling on me…

I rushed to the bathroom
and switched on the light

my god, JoJo had *fleas*.

I stepped into the shower
stood there
adjusting the water,
thinking,
that poor
dear
girl.

an ordinary poem

since you've always wanted

to know I am going to admit that I never liked Shakespeare, Browning, the

Bronte sisters,

Tolstoy, baseball, summers on the shore, arm-

wrestling, hockey, Thomas Mann, Vivaldi, Winston Churchill, Dudley

Moore, free verse,

pizza, bowling, the Olympic Games, the Three Stooges, the Marx

Brothers, Ives, Al Jolson, Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, Mickey

Mouse, basketball,

fathers, mothers, cousins, wives, shack jobs (although preferable

to the former),

and I don't like the Nutcracker Suite, the Academy Awards, Hawthorne,

Melville, pumpkin pie, New Year's Eve, Christmas, Labor Day, the

Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, The Who,

Bacon, Dr. Spock, Blackstone and Berlioz, Franz

Liszt, pantyhose,

lice, fleas, goldfish, crabs, spiders, war
heroes, space flights, camels (I don't trust camels) or the
Bible,
Updike, Erica Jong, Corso, bartenders, fruit flies, Jane
Fonda,
churches, weddings, birthdays, newscasts, watch
dogs, .22 rifles, Henry
Fonda
and all the women who should have loved me but
didn't and
the first day of Spring and the
last

and the first line of this poem
and this one
that you're reading
now.

from an old dog in his cups…

ah, my friend, it's awful, worse

than that—you just get

going good—

one bottle down and

gone—

the poems simmering in your

head

but

halfway between 60 and

70

you pause

before opening the

second bottle—

sometimes

don't

for after 50 years of

heavy drinking

you might assume

that extra bottle

will set you

babbling in some

rest home

or tender you

a stroke

alone in your

place

the cats chewing at

your flesh

as the morning fog

enters the broken

screen.

one doesn't even *think* of

the liver

and if the liver

doesn't think of

us, that's

fine.

but it does seem

the more we drink

the better the words

go.

death doesn’t matter

but the ultimate inconvenience

of near-death is worse than

galling.

I’ll finish the night off

with

beer.

let ’em go

let’s let the bombs go

I’m tired of waiting

I’ve put away my toys

folded the road maps

canceled my subscription to *Time*

kissed Disneyland goodbye

I’ve taken the flea collars off my cats

unplugged the tv

I no longer dream of pink flamingoes

I no longer check the market index

let’s let ’em go

let’s let ’em blow

I’m tired of waiting

I don’t like this kind of blackmail

I don’t like governments playing cutesy with my life:

either crap or get off the pot

I’m tired of waiting

I’m tired of dangling

I’m tired of the fix

let the bombs blow

you cheap sniveling cowardly nations

you mindless giants

do it

do it

do it!

and escape to your planets and space stations

then you can fuck it

up there too.

trying to make it

new jock in from Arizona

doesn't know this town

but his agent did get him a mount

in the first race

last Saturday

and the jock took the freeway

in

on the same day as

the U.S.C. vs. U.C.L.A. football

game

and got caught

in one of the two special lanes

which took him to the Rose Bowl

instead of the race

track.

he was forced to drive all the way

to the football game

parking lot

before he could turn

around.

by the time he got to the track

the first race

was over.

another jock had won with his

mount.

today out there

I noticed on the program that the

new jock from Arizona

had a good mount in the

6th.

then the horse became a late

scratch.

sometimes getting started

in the big time

is tantamount to

trying to raise an erection

in a tornado

and even if you do

nobody has the time

to notice.

the death of a splendid neighborhood

there was a place off Western Ave.

where you went up a stairway

to get head

and there was a big biker

sitting there

wearing his swastika jacket.

he was there to smell you out

if you were the

heat

and to protect the girls

if you weren't.

it was just above the

Philadelphia Hoagie Shop

there in L.A.

where the girls came down

when things got

slow

and ate something

else.

the man who ran the

sandwich shop

hated the girls

he didn't like to

serve them

but he was

afraid not

to.

then one day

I came by

and the biker wasn't there

or the girls

either,

and it hadn't been a simple

bust

it had been a

shoot-out:

there were bullet holes

in the door

above the

stairway.

I went into the Hoagie shop
for a sandwich and a
beer
and the proprietor told
me,
“things are better
now.”

after that
I had to leave town
for a couple of
days
and when I got back
and walked down
to the Hoagie shop
I saw that the plate glass
window
had been busted
out
and was covered with
boards.
inside the walls

and the counter had been

blackened by

fire.

about that same

time

my girlfriend went crazy

and started screwing one man

after

another.

almost everything good was

gone.

I gave my landlord a month's

notice and moved in

3 weeks.

you get so alone at times that it just makes sense

when I was a starving writer I used to read the major writers in the

major magazines (in the library, of course) and it made me feel

very bad because—being a student of the word and the way, I realized

that they were faking it: I could sense each false emotion, each

utter pretense, it made me feel that the editors had their

heads up their asses—or were being politicized into publishing

in-groups of power

but

I just kept writing and not eating very much—went down from 197 pounds

to 137—but—got very much practice typing and reading printed rejection

slips.

it was when I reached 137 pounds that I said, to hell with it, quit

typing and concentrated on drinking and the streets and the ladies of

the streets—at least those people didn't read *Harper's, The Atlantic* or

Poetry, a magazine of verse.

and frankly, it was a fair and refreshing ten year lay-off

then I came back and tried it again to find that the editors still had

their heads up their asses and/or etc.

but I was up to 225 pounds

rested

and full of background music—

ready to give it another shot in the

dark.

a good gang, after all

I keep hearing from the old dogs,

men who have been writing for

decades,

poets all,

they're still at their

typers

writing better than

ever

past wives and wars and

jobs

and all the things that

happen.

many I disliked for personal

and artistic

reasons…

but what I overlooked was

their endurance and

their ability to

improve.

these old dogs

living in smoky rooms

pouring the

bottle…

they lash against the

typer ribbons: they came

to

fight.

this

being drunk at the typer beats being with any woman
I've ever seen or known or heard about
like
Joan of Arc, Cleopatra, Garbo, Harlow, M.M. or
any of the thousands that come and go on that
celluloid screen
or the temporary girls I've seen so lovely
on park benches, on buses, at dances and parties, at
beauty contests, cafes, circuses, parades, department
stores, skeet shoots, balloon flys, auto races, rodeos,
bull fights, mud wrestling, roller derbies, pie bakes,
churches, volleyball games, boat races, county fairs,
rock concerts, jails, laundromats or wherever

being drunk at this typer beats being with any woman
I've ever seen or
known.

hot

there's fire in the fingers and there's fire in the shoes and there's

fire in walking across a room

there's fire in the cat's eyes and there's fire in the cat's

balls

and the wrist watch crawls like a snake across the back of the

dresser

and the refrigerator contains 9,000 frozen red hot dreams

and as I listen to the symphonies of dead composers

I am consumed with a glad sadness

there's fire in the walls

and the snails in the garden only want love

and there's fire in the crabgrass

we are burning burning burning

there's fire in a glass of water

the tombs of India smile like smitten motherfuckers

the meter maids cry alone at one a.m. on rainy nights

there's fire in the cracks of the sidewalks

and

all during the night as I have been drinking and typing these

eleven or twelve poems

the lights have gone off and on

there is a wild wind outside

and in between times

I have sat in the dark here

electric (haha) typer off lights out radio off

drinking in the dark

lighting cigarettes in the dark

there was fire off the match

we are all burning together

burning brothers and sisters

I like it I like it I like

it.

late late late poem

you think about the time in

Malibu

after taking the tall girl

to dinner and drinks

you came out to the Volks

and the clutch was

gone

(no Auto Club card)

nothing out there but the

ocean and

25 miles to your

room

(her suitcase there

after an air trip from somewhere

in Texas)

and you say to her, “well,

maybe we’ll swim back in,” and

she forgets to

smile.

and the problem with
writing these poems
as you get into number 7 or
8 or 9
into the second bottle near
3 a.m.
trying to light your
cigarette with a book of
stamps
after already setting the
wastebasket on fire

once
is
that there is still some
adventure and joy
in typing
as the radio roars its
classical music
but the content
begins to get
thin.

3 a.m. games:

the worst thing is

being drunk

all the lighters gone

dumb

matchbooks

empty

cigarette and cigar stubs

all about

you find a small pack of

matches

with 3 paper

matches

but the matches go

limp against the worn match

cover

shit:

drink without smoke is like

cock without

pussy

you drink some

more

search about

find one paper match of

happiness

carefully scratch it

against the least-worn

empty match

pack

it *flares*!

you've got your

smoke!

you light

up

you flick the match

toward a

tray

it misses

and

like that…

a flame rises

everything is BURNING

at last!

: an American Express customer

receipt

: some of the empty match

books

: even one of the dead

lighters

the flame whirls and

leaps

then the whole ashtray of

cigarette and cigar stubs

begins to smoke

as if mouths were inhaling

them

you battle the flames with

various and sundry objects

including your

hands

until finally the flame is

gone and there is nothing but

smoke

as again you get that

re-occurring thought: *I must be*

crazy.

you hear your wife's

voice:

"Hank, are you all

right?"

she's on the other side of

the wall in the

bedroom

"oh, I'm fine…"

"I smell smoke…is the house burning

down?"

"just a small fire, Linda…I got

it…go to sleep…"

she is the one who got you

the steel wastebasket

after a similar

occurrence

soon she is asleep

again

and you’re searching

for more

matches.

someday I'm going to write a primer for crippled saints but meanwhile...

as the Bomb sits out there in the hands of a

diminishing species

all you want

is me sitting next to you

with popcorn and Dr. Pepper

as those dull celluloid teeth

chew away at

my remains.

I don't worry too much about the

Bomb—the madhouses are full

enough

and I always remember

after one of the best pieces of ass

I ever had

I went to the bathroom and

masturbated—hard to kill a man

like that with a

Bomb?

anyhow, I've finally shaken
R. Jeffers and Celine from my
belltower
and I sit there alone
with you and
Dostoevsky
as the real and the
artificial heart
continues to
falter,
famished…

I love you but
don't know what to
do.

help wanted

I was a crazed young man and then found this book written by a

crazed older man and I felt better because he was

able to write it down

and then I found a later book by this same crazed older

man

only to me

he seemed no longer crazed he just appeared to be

dull—

we all hold up well for a while, then inherent with flaws and

skips and misses

most of us

so often deteriorate overnight

into a state so near defecation

that the end result is almost unbearable to the

senses.

luckily, I found a few other crazed men who almost remained that

way until they

died.

that’s more sporting, you know, and lends a bit more to our

lives

as we attend to our—

inumbrate—

tasks.

sticks and stones…

complaint is often the result of an insufficient

ability

to live within

the obvious restrictions of this

god damned cage.

complaint is a common deficiency

more prevalent than

hemorrhoids

and as these lady writers hurl their spiked shoes

at me

wailing that

their poems will never be

promulgated

all that I can say to them

is

show me more leg

show me more ass—

that's all you (or I) have

while

it lasts

and for this common and obvious truth

they screech at me:

MOTHERFUCKER SEXIST PIG!

as if that would stop the way fruit trees

drop their fruit

or the ocean brings in the coni and

the dead spores of the Grecian

Empire

but I feel no grief for being called something

which

I am not;

in fact, it's enthralling, somehow, like a good

back rub

on a frozen night

behind the ski lift at

Aspen.

working

ah, those days when I

ran them

in and out of my

shabby apartment.

god, I was a hairy

ugly

thing

and I backed them

all onto the

springs

flailing

away

I was the mindless

drunken ape

in a sad and

dying

neighborhood.

but strangest

of all

were the

new and continuous

arrivals:

it was a

female

parade

and

I exulted

pranced and

pounced

with hardly

an idea

of what

it

meant.

it was a well-

remembered bed-

room

painted a strange

blue.

and
most of the
ladies
left just before
noon

about the time
the mailman
arrived.

he spoke to me
one day, “my god,
man, where do you
get them all?”

“I don’t know,” I
told him.

“pardon me,” he went
on, “but you don’t
exactly look like
God’s gift to
women, how do you
do it?”

“I don’t know,”

I said.

and it was

true: it just

happened and I

did it

in my blue

bedroom

with my

dead mother’s

best lace table

linen

tacked up

over the

window.

I was a

fucking

fool.

over done

he had somehow located me again—he was on the telephone—talking

about the old days—

wonder whatever happened to Michael or Ken or

Julie Anne?—

and remember…?

—then

there were his present problems—

—he was a talker—he had always been a

talker—

and I had been a

listener

I had listened because I hadn't wanted to

hurt him

by telling him to shut up

like the others

did

in the old

days

now

he was back

and

I held the phone out

at arm's length

and could still hear the

sound—

I handed the phone to my girlfriend and

she listened for a

while—

finally

I took the phone and told him—

hey, man, we've got to stop, the meat's burning

in the oven!

he said, o.k., man, I'll call you

back—

(one thing I remembered about my

old buddy: he was good for his

word)

I put the phone back on the

receiver—

—we don’t have any meat in the

oven, said my

girlfriend—

—yes, we do, I told her,

it’s

me.

our laughter is muted by their agony

as the child crosses the street as deep sea divers

dive as the painters paint—

the good fight against terrible odds is the vindication

and the glory as the swallow rises toward

the moon—

it is so dark now with the sadness of

people

they were tricked, they were taught to expect the

ultimate when nothing is

promised

now young girls weep alone in small rooms

old men angrily swing their canes at

visions as

ladies comb their hair as

ants search for survival

history surrounds us

and our lives

slink away

in

shame.

murder

competition, greed, desire for fame—
after great beginnings they mostly
write when they don't want to write, they write to
order, they write for Cadillacs and younger
girls—and to pay off
old wives.

they appear on talk shows, attend parties
with their peers.
most go to Hollywood, they become snipers and
gossips
and have more and more affairs with younger
and younger girls and/or
men.
they write between Hollywood and the parties,
it's timeclock writing
and in between the panties and/or the
jockstraps
and the cocaine
many of them manage to screw up with the

IRS.

between old wives, new wives, newer and

newer girls (and/or)

all their royalties and residuals—

the hundreds of thousands of

dollars—

are now suddenly

debts.

the writing becomes a useless

spasm

a jerk-off of a once

mighty

gift.

it happens and happens and

continues to:

the mutilation of talent

the gods seldom

give

but so quickly

take.

what am I doing?

got to stop battling these wild speed jocks on the freeway as we

roar through hairline openings with stereo blasting through

noon and evening and darkness

when actually all we want is to sit in cool green gardens

talking quietly over drinks.

what makes us this way?—ingrown toenails?—or that the ladies

are not enough?—what foolishness makes us tweak the nose of

Death continually?

are we afraid of the slow bedpan?—or slobbering over half-

cooked peas brought to us by a bored nurse with thick

dumb legs?

what wanton hare-brained impulse makes us floor it with

only one hand on the wheel?

don't we realize the peace of aging

gently?

what hell-call is this to war?

we are the sickest of the breed—as fine museums—great art—

generations of knowledge—are all forgotten

as we find profundity in being an

asshole—

we are going to end up as a

photograph—almost life-sized—hanging

as a warning on the

Traffic Court wall

and people will shudder just a bit and

look the other way

knowing that

too much ego is not

enough.

nervous people

you go in for an item—take it to the clerk at the register —he

doesn't know the price—begs leave—returns after a long

time—stares at the electronic cash register—rings up the

sale with some difficulty: $47,583.64—you don't have it

with you—he laughs—calls for help—another clerk

arrives—after another long time he finds a new total:

$1.27. I pay—then must ask for a bag—I thank the

clerk—walk to parking with the lady I am with—"you

make people nervous," she tells me—

we drive home with the item—we put the item to its task —it

doesn't work—the item has a factory

defect—

"I'll take it back," she says—

I go to the bathroom and piss squarely in the center of the

pot—warfare is just one of the problems which besets everyone

during the life of a decent day.

working out

Van Gogh cut off his ear

gave it to a

prostitute

who flung it away in

extreme

disgust.

Van, whores don't want

ears

they want

money.

I guess that's why you were

such a great

painter: you

didn't understand

much

else.

how is your heart?

during my worst times

on the park benches

in the jails

or living with

whores

I always had this certain

contentment—

I wouldn't call it

happiness—

it was more of an inner

balance

that settled for

whatever was occurring

and it helped in the

factories

and when relationships

went wrong

with the

girls.

it helped
through the
wars and the
hangovers
the backalley fights
the
hospitals.

to awaken in a cheap room
in a strange city and
pull up the shade—
this was the craziest kind of
contentment

and to walk across the floor
to an old dresser with a
cracked mirror—
see myself, ugly,
grinning at it all.

what matters most is
how well you
walk through the
fire.

forget it

now, listen, when I die I don't want any crying, just get the

disposal under way, I've had a full some life, and

if anybody has had an edge, I've

had it, I've lived 7 or 8 lives in one, enough for

anybody.

we are all, finally, the same, so no speeches, please,

unless you want to say he played the horses and was very

good at that.

you're next and I already know something you don't,

maybe.

quiet

sitting tonight

at this

table

by the

window

the woman is

glooming

in the

bedroom

these are her

especially bad

days.

well, I have

mine

so

in deference

to her

the typewriter

is

still.

it’s odd,

printing this stuff

by

hand

reminds me of

days

past

when things were

not

going well

in another

fashion.

now

the cat comes to

see

me

he flops

under the table

between my

feet

we are both

melting

in the same

fire.

and, dear

cat, we're still

working with the

poem

and some have

noted

that there's some

"slippage"

here.

well, at age

65, I can

"slip"

plenty, yet still

run rings

around

those pamby

critics.

Li Po knew

what to do:

drink another

bottle and

face

the consequences.

I turn to my

right, see this huge

head (reflected in the

window) sucking at

a cigarette

and

we grin at

each

other.

then

I turn

back

sit here

and

print more words upon this

paper

there is never

a final

grand

statement

and that's the

fix

and the trick

that works

against

us

but

I wish you could see

my

cat

he has a

splash

of white on his

face

against an

orange-yellow

background

and then

as I look up

and into the

kitchen

I see a bright

portion

under the overhead

light

that shades into

darkness

and then into darker

darkness and

I can’t see

beyond

that.

it’s ours

there is always that space there

just before they get to us

that space

that fine relaxer

the breather

while say

flopping on a bed

thinking of nothing

or say

pouring a glass of water from the

spigot

while entranced by

nothing

that

gentle pure

space

it’s worth

centuries of

existence

say

just to scratch your neck

while looking out the window at

a bare branch

that space

there

before they get to us

ensures

that

when they do

they won’t

get it all

ever.

About the Author

CHARLES BUKOWSKI is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose, and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother in 1920, and brought to the United States at the age of three. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for fifty years. He published his first story in 1944 when he was twenty-four and began writing poetry at the age of thirty-five. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last novel, *Pulp* (1994).

During his lifetime he published more than forty-five books of poetry and prose, including the novels *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989). Among his most recent books are the posthumous editions of *What Matters Most Is How Well You Walk Through the Fire* (1999), *Open All Night: New Poems* (2000), *Beerspit Night and Cursing: The Correspondence of Charles Bukowski and Sheri Martinelli, 1960-1967* (2001), and *The Night Torn Mad with Footsteps: New Poems* (2001).

All of his books have now been published in translation in over a dozen languages and his worldwide popularity remains undiminished. In the years to come, Ecco will publish additional volumes of previously uncollected poetry and letters.

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